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Nick Carter Stories

BROKEN BARS

OR

Nick Carter's Speedy Service

NICK CARTER STORIES

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BROKEN BARS;

Or, NICK CARTER'S SPEEDY SERVICE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

BIRDS OF FLIGHT.

It was six o'clock when Nick Carter arrived at the county jail—six in the morning.

In company with Chick Carter and Patsy Garvan, his two assistants, Nick hastened across the jail yard and entered the office of the warden, Horace Gardner, who had immediately telephoned to him after the extraordinary break was discovered.

The warden, two officers employed in the jail, and the local physician, Doctor Magruder, were present when the detectives entered. The only other occupant of the office was the deputy warden, Murton Hackett, who for six years had been the night officer in charge of the jail.

He then was lying on a settee, with his head pillowed upon some folded garments. He was about forty years old, a compact, muscular man with rounded shoulders, a large head, and rather coarse facial features. He had a square jaw, a prominent nose, and thick lips. He was not an attractive man from the standpoint of personal beauty.

He was more unattractive than usual that morning, furthermore, in the bright light shed through the office windows. His brow was marred with a long, dark bruise, that extended backward well into his mop of tawny brown hair. His features were drawn and haggard. There was a smooch of blood on his chin, from a scratch on his lower lip. His wrists were bruised and swollen, bearing the lurid lines left by the cords with which he had been brutally bound.

Doctor Magruder had just administered a stimulant, having arrived only a few moments before the three detectives. It had begun to be effective. A tinge of color was rising in Hackett's cheeks when Nick and his assistants entered the room.

Warden Gardner at once turned to greet him, saying quickly:

"Thank Heaven, Carter, that you are on hand so promptly. My first move was to send for you. This is bad business, frightfully bad. All the good work you have done here in Shelby has been knocked on the head. We have lost the entire gang, including even the woman, Janet Payson. I am overwhelmed, literally overwhelmed."

"But how——"

"Oh, it's not Hackett's fault. He is in no sense to blame," Gardner went on impulsively. "We found him insensible, bound hand and foot and tied to one of the cell doors. He was nearly strangled with the gag the miscreants had tied in his mouth. He would have been a dead man in another hour, Carter, as sure as fate. If he——"

"Stop a moment," Nick interrupted, glancing at the haggard face of the deputy warden. "One can see plainly enough that he has been roughly handled. Skip all else, Gardner, and tell me precisely what has occurred and just what you know about it."

"That can be quickly told," Warden Gardner replied. "The entire gang of railway bandits has escaped. The window bars of one of the cells, that occupied by Jeff Murdock, the ringleader, were cut from outside by some unknown man during the early hours of last night. He got into the cell with Murdock and concealed himself under the cot. At three o'clock this morning, as is his custom, Hackett made a tour through the jail to be sure that all was right."

"He was alone?" Nick questioned.

"Yes, as usual. He seldom has an officer accompany him, though two night men are always within call, in case of need. Last night was no exception, but Hackett had no time to call for help. He was knocked out before he could do so."

"How so? What occurred?"

"This entire gang was confined on the second floor of the west wing," continued the warden. "There are only

ten cells in that section, and these were the only prisoners in the wing. I have made it a point to keep them separated from all of the others, pending their trial and transfer to the State's prison."

"Well?"

"While passing hrough the corridor, Hackett heard a half-choked groan from Murdock's cell. One of the other prisoners, Dick Bryan, spoke to him, and said he thought Murdock must be ill, as he had been kept awake for more than an hour by his groaning."

"Humph! What followed?"

"Hackett looked into Murdock's cell, and saw him lying on the floor. He was nearly naked. He had fallen from his cot, and appeared to be in a fit. There was a white froth covering his mouth and chin."

"Soap and spittle, Gardner, most likely," Nick said dryly.

"Yes, undoubtedly, in view of what ensued," groaned the warden. "Bear in mind, Carter, that Murdock has been a model prisoner while here. He has appeared to be the only decent man in the entire gang."

"The reason for it is now obvious," said Nick, smiling significantly. "Appearances are often deceitful, Gardner. Though the best of the gang from that standpoint, Jeff Murdock is by far the worst of the lot."

"I am compelled to agree with you."

"There is no question about it."

"Be that as it may, however, Hackett immediately unlocked the door and stepped into the cell," Warden Gardner proceeded. "He did not, of course, notice the window bars in the darkness outside, and the window itself was closed. He crouched to make a closer inspection of the prostrate man, and—well, that settled it."

"How settled it, Gardner?"

"Blast him, he had me by the throat on the instant," Hackett now put in huskily from the settee on which he still was lying.

"He seized you by the throat, did he?" Nick turned to him.

"Yes, as quick as a flash," groaned the deputy. "I grappled with him, of course, and reached for my revolver. I tried to call for help, too, but his cursed fingers were eating into my throat. See for yourself."

Hackett drew down his coat collar and displayed the lurid finger marks, and the scratches left by the nails of his assailant. Then he straightened up a little with an effort, and added, with manifest grief and chagrin over what had transpired:

"I'd rather have given my life, Carter, my life itself, than to have had this occur."

"Well, well, it may be remedied," Nick said encouragingly.

"I did not dream that another man was in the cell," Hackett went on. "I went at Murdock hammer and tongs, feeling sure that I could get the upper hand of him, and I did not even hear the movements of the other when he scrambled from under the cot."

"I see," Nick nodded.

"I knew he was there only when I felt him fiercely turn me from on top of Murdock, and then the whelp struck me with a sandbag, a blackjack, or something of the kind. That was all I knew until Dolan found me and threw water on my head."

Hackett pointed to the settled bruise on his forehead and glanced at one of the listening officers. He then sank back again upon the settee, a picture of bitter despair and disgust.

"That's true, sir," Dolan put in, addressing the detective. "I found him tied to the cell door with some tarred cords. He was near death's door, too, by his looks."

"How long ago was this?" Nick questioned.

"Less than an hour, sir," said Dolan. "Every cell in that section was empty. The rascals had unlocked the doors with Hackett's keys, and all had escaped through the window of Murdock's cell. They reached the ground by means of a rope suspended by an outside confederate from the heavy copper gutter on the edge of the roof directly above the window. How in thunder he got up there and hooked it into the gutter is more than I can tell."

"I will see for myself," Nick said abruptly. "Lead the way, Gardner. I'll have a look at Murdock's cell, to begin with. It does appear, indeed, that all of my good work in Shelby has been knocked on the head."

It was ten days since Nick Carter and his assistants had completed that work—the running down of a gang of bandits for crimes committed along the S. & O. Railway, including the murder of a signal-tower operator and the robbery of one of the night-express cars of sixty thousand dollars. The latter had been planned and carried out by one of the former railway hands, Jefferson Murdock, with the help of one woman confederate and a gang comprising Jake Hanlon, Link Magee, and Dick Bryan, with the two Mauler brothers, Sol and Zeke, now known to have been the chief culprits guilty of the long series of railway crimes and outrages.

For ten days they had been awaiting trial, lodged in the Shelby county jail, and Nick and his two assistants, who had accomplished this wholesale capture, had returned from New York to Shelby the day before to testify at the trial, which was set for the very day after the extraordinary escape had been made.

The Shelby county jail, however, was not a modern prison with all of the up-to-date safeguards against such mishaps. It was a rugged stone building of two stories, with a pitched roof of slate. It was situated in an inferior section of the town, and surrounded with a ten-foot wall of stone. It had been built about thirty years before, and increasing needs had led to the addition of a wing on the west side of the grim old edifice, and it was from the upper section of this wing that the escape of Jeff Murdock and his confederates had been made.

The calamity had been discovered by Dolan soon after five o'clock that morning. Warden Gardner was hastily notified. Hackett was immediately removed to the warden's office and a physician summoned.

Nick Carter then had been notified by telephone, and though informed of none of the details of the affair at that time, he soon was on his way from the Shelby House with Chick and Patsy, arriving at the jail at precisely six o'clock, as stated, or somewhat less than an hour after the escape of the bandit gang was discovered.

CHAPTER II.

SUBTLE WORK.

Nick Carter stepped into the cell in which Hackett had been overcome, and from which Jeff Murdock had escaped with one after another of his liberated confederates.

Chick Carter followed him, while Patsy remained with

Warden Gardner in the adjoining corridor, which ran straight through the wing and between a double row of cells, the doors of which then stood open as the outlaws had left them.

The scene in that lately occupied by Murdock was about what Nick expected. It had not been put in order since the fight and the subsequent flight of the crooks. The washstand and stool were overturned. The blankets were in disorder on the iron cot. There were smooches of blood on the stone floor.

"It looks like the real thing," Chick remarked, when Nick paused for a moment and glanced around.

"Yes, on the surface," Nick replied. "It's a fine mess, a deplorable get-away. It will make wicked work for us, I think, before we shake ourselves free from the dust of Shelby."

"It does look so, for fair."

Nick turned and approached the window, which then was open. A glance confirmed the statements made by the warden.

Three of the six vertical bars, which were cemented into the stonework outside of the window, had been cut a few inches from the bottom, and then bent aside so as to easily permit the passing of even a large man.

A long rope still was dangling near the window, secured above and reaching to the ground some twenty feet below. The rope was soiled with spots of paint, and upon leaning out and looking up, Nick could see the crook of a large double-pronged hook, such as painters sometimes use for suspending the rope of a staging tackle. The hook was securely adjusted into a heavy copper gutter some six feet above the top of the window.

Glancing toward the near corner of the wing, for the cell was that nearest the corner, Nick saw that a strong copper conductor ran upward from the ground to the gutter. It was secured with iron brackets to the face of the wall, about a foot from the corner, and about eight feet from the window of the cell.

"It could have been done by an athlete, no doubt, but he would have to be a remarkably good one," Nick observed, when Chick joined him and gazed from the window.

"You mean to have climbed that conductor?"

"Certainly. He must have carried the hook over his shoulder, with the rope dangling, and then worked himself hand over hand along the gutter until opposite this window. He then could have set the hook in the gutter and let himself down the rope to the window sill, on which he then would have had a footing."

"It would have been quite a stunt," said Chick, sizing up all of the difficulties.

"I think I could accomplish it."

"So do I, Nick, as far as that goes."

"What we could do, then, another may have done," said Nick. "We must find out positively, nevertheless, whether that is the way it was done."

"You suspect——"

"Nothing definite, Chick, at present," Nick quickly interposed with lowered voice. "I think, however, we had better size up this affair on the quiet. We may derive an advantage from not revealing anything we discover, or suspect."

"That's right, too."

"It was cloudy and dark last night, with considerable wind blowing. This wall of the wing would have been in the lee, however, and the noise of the wind around the building would have helped drown any sounds made by an outsider. Notice, too, that the surroundings west of the jail are particularly favorable for such a job."

"Right again, Nick," Chick agreed.

The outlook from the window was all that these remarks implied. There was the west yard of the jail, about thirty feet from the side of the building to the high wall.

Beyond the wall was a narrow street, unpaved and muddy, a street but little used except by the tenants of a row of old wooden buildings on the side opposite the jail wall.

They were the quarters of a carpenter, a junk dealer, a bottler of soft drinks, a painter, and two saloons, one on either end of the long row of inferior buildings. Beyond them were others of like character, with numerous yards and alleys between them, forming a labyrinth through which a gang of crooks could easily have stolen away with comparative safety.

Two ladders still were standing against the jail wall, moreover, one on each side, which the escaping outlaws had not lingered to remove. All stood out in relief in the light of the early morning, but the gloom of the night before would have hidden all.

"This would have been the most favorable window for an outside confederate to have selected for the job," Nick remarked, while deliberately sizing up the case. "This rope and those two ladders on the wall were probably stolen from the paint shop yonder. Notice the spots of paint on them."

"True," Chick nodded. "That's as plain as twice two."

"Ah, here's a saw, or one of them, with which these bars were cut."

Nick had turned it with his foot, and heard it jingling on the stone floor. He picked it up and examined it—a thin, pliable saw of fine-tempered steel. Turning to the window, he began a closer inspection of the cut bars and the stone into which they were cemented, which then was soiled with oil and grease that had been used to prevent the rasping of the saw.

Presently, taking a lens from his pocket, Nick examined a substance on the end of one of the bars, and some particles of it that had fallen upon the sill.

"By Jove, this is quite significant," he said quietly, displaying some of the substance on the tip of his finger.

"What do you make of it?" Chick inquired.

"It's black putty."

"What need of that?"

"It evidently was used for filling in the cuts in these bars, so that they would not be seen by any of the jail officers who might enter the cell," Nick quietly explained. "It shows plainly that the bars were cut previous to last night."

"In other words, then, this work has probably been going on for several days, or nights," said Chick.

"That's the very point."

"Murdock must have cut them himself, then, instead of an outsider."

"Exactly."

"But how came he with the necessary tools and the black putty? They must have been smuggled in to him."

"Undoubtedly."

"By whom, then, is the question."

"One of the questions," Nick said a bit dryly. "There will be others, many of them, unless I am much mistaken.

There is more to this break, Chick, than appears on the surface. We must look farther. Come down with me to the yard."

Nick led the way from the cell while speaking, and Warden Gardner hurriedly approached him.

"Well, Carter, what do you find?" he asked anxiously.

"No more than your own eyes can see," Nick replied evasively. "There seems to be nothing to it. We'll go down to the jail yard, however. I wish to inspect the copper conductor."

"Do you think that an outsider climbed it?"

"That appears to be the case."

"But it seems impossible, utterly impossible," Gardner gravely objected.

"I don't quite agree with you," said Nick, while they descended the stairs to a lower corridor. "A lithe and muscular man might have accomplished it. The conductor should not have been put there."

"Surely not, Carter, if you are right."

"Is there a roof scuttle?" Nick paused and inquired.

"Yes."

"Go up there with Dolan, Chick, and have a look at the roof," Nick directed, with a glance at his chief assistant. "Find out whether the hook could have been placed in the gutter from the scuttle, and whether there is any evidence of it."

Chick hastened to the office in search of Dolan, with whom he presently carried out Nick's instructions.

Neither the scuttle, however, nor the sloping slate roof bore any evidence of work done from within, though Chick saw at a glance that it would have been possible for an agile man to have let himself down to the gutter in order to set the hook securely.

In the meantime, in company with Patsy and the warden, Nick examined the base of the copper conductor and the wall to which it was attached. Both bore faint marks and scratches, apparently caused by the shoes of a man who had attempted to climb the conductor, though no additional evidence showed whether he had really succeeded.

Turning from the building, Nick then began a careful inspection of the ground in the direction of the wall and ladders left by the crooks. The gravel surface of the yard, however, bore no definite footprints, and Nick then mounted the inner ladder to go over the wall.

"Wait here, Gardner, or in the office," he directed. "I shall return in a very few minutes. You may go with me, Patsy, in case of need."

Patsy scrambled up the ladder after him, and both descended to the opposite side of the high wall. It then was only half past six. Men employed in that locality had not yet come to work. The opposite buildings still were closed, and the narrow street was deserted.

"By Jove, these are more like it," said Nick, pausing for a moment.

"Footprints?' questioned Patsy, tersely.

"Yes. They show at least the direction taken by the rascals."

"Sure thing, chief, and there are plenty of them."

There were, indeed, numerous tracks in the damp soil of the unpaved road. All pointed in one direction, nearly straight across the street and toward an alley between the paint shop mentioned and the building occupied by a bottler of soft drinks.

Most of them were tracks of men, though one among them was plainly that of a woman, the narrow soles and pointed heels of the stylish shoes worn by Janet Payson, Murdock's female confederate in the recent express-car robbery.

"All took this direction, Patsy," said Nick, more closely inspecting them while they crossed the street. "Notice the different sizes. There are six men in this gang, and that fly Philadelphia jade who came here with Jeff Murdock."

"She's fly, chief, all right."

"They evidently fled through this alley, quickly getting under cover between the buildings and—— Hold on! Stop a moment."

Nick had entered the alley while speaking, only to halt abruptly and crouch to take a closer look at the soft ground.

"What have you found?" asked Patsy, bending nearer.

"Other tracks."

"Others?"

"Yes. Strange to say, though, they are tracks of—another woman."

"Another woman, eh? Are you sure of it, chief?"

"See for yourself."

Nick pointed to several distinct footprints, nearer to one of the buildings than those left by the gang when they fled through the alley. There were more of them, too, and they pointed in every direction.

"Gee! there's no mistaking them, chief," Patsy quickly agreed. "They are a woman's tracks, all right."

"And very significant."

"Why so?"

"The abundance of them, Patsy, to begin with, and the fact that they point in all directions," said Nick. "The woman stood here for a long time. She evidently was hiding here and was waiting and watching. She moved about some, which accounts for the numerous footprints."

"She may have been watching to warn the gang of any danger."

"That's more than likely."

"Another woman, eh?" Patsy repeated. "Gee whiz! Who can she be? We know of no other woman identified with this gang, except Jake Hanlon's wife, and these tracks are much too small for her feet. She's big and brawny."

"They are not her tracks," Nick replied. "We may be able to find out, however, whose they are."

"You're wise to something?"

"Yes. Notice the heel prints. Here are two that are quite distinct. Observe that the heel is unusually broad, also very low. It sank into the ground hardly more than the sole."

"That's plain enough, chief, but what do you make of it?"

"The heels of this woman's shoes were cut down," Nick replied. "Not more than a single lift was left. She has some reason for wearing very low heels."

"They may have been worn down," Patsy suggested.

"Not as low as these, Patsy, nor as even," Nick objected. "The shoes would have worn out completely before that could occur. These heels were made low for some reason."

"I guess you are right, chief, after all."

"Here's another point, also," said Nick, then following the tracks through the alley.

"What's that?"

"This woman toes in."

"Gee! She may be an Indian," Patsy exclaimed, laughing.

"There is some truth in that."

"But there are no Indians in these parts, chief."

"You're wrong about that," said Nick. "I don't mean an Indian in feathers and beaded skirt. The garments do not make the Indian. I mean that this woman, or girl, for her tracks indicate the latter, may be of Indian descent. There were formerly numerous tribes in this State."

"You may be right, then."

"And the traits of her ancestry may have stuck to her," Nick continued. "The majority of Indians are flat-footed and toe in when walking. Moccasins were their footwear, and they never took to shoes with heels. This may explain the two unusual characteristics in these tracks. The girl may be of Indian descent."

"We ought to be able to locate her, chief, in that case."

"I think so."

"You feel sure that she was waiting and watching here?"

"Reasonably sure," Nick nodded. "Also that she fled with the gang. Notice that her tracks mingle with theirs, and that all lead across this rear yard and around the stone building yonder. There would be nothing in trailing them farther. The rascals have made a successful get-away. That's dead open and shut."

"How to get them, then, is the question."

"We'll get them, Patsy, if we lie awake nights to find a way," Nick replied a bit grimly. "We now will return to the jail. Not a word about this to others."

"I'm dumb, chief, you can bet on that."

"Ah, here is where the rope and ladders were obtained." Nick had turned back in the yard in the rear of the paint shop. A door leading to a space under the building had been broken open. The broken padlock was lying on the ground. Pushed under the building were several other ladders and coils of rope, used by the workmen for house painting, the discovery of which had occasioned Nick's last remark.

Nick did not delay to inspect them, however, but returned with Patsy to the jail office, where the warden then was awaiting them.

Chick caught Nick's eye when he entered, and he shook his head to signify that he had not made any important discovery on the roof.

Hackett then was seated in one of the office chairs, still looking exceedingly pale and haggard, but he gazed up and asked anxiously when the detective entered:

"What's the outlook, Mr. Carter? By heaven, sir, I hope you'll run down these rats again. I'd give my year's pay to get one crack at the two knaves who did me up in this way."

"We'll get them, Hackett, sooner or later," Nick replied confidently.

"I hope so, sir."

"They have made a clean get-away, nevertheless, and it appears to have been accomplished with outside help," Nick added. "I could find no clew to the identity of their assistant, however, nor any evidence of special significance. I will do all I can with the case."

"I am glad to know that, sir, at least," Hackett huskily declared.

"I have sent for a carriage to take him home," put in the warden, laying his hand on the shoulder of the injured deputy. "Doctor Magruder has ordered him to remain in bed for a day or two, or until he has recovered from the nervous shock."

"That's good judgment," Nick said approvingly. "The rascals handled you roughly, Hackett, and a hard bang on the head sometimes proves serious. Go to bed and remain there for a day or two, at least."

"Really, Carter, I feel fit for nothing else," Hackett wearily answered.

Dolan entered with a cabman at that moment, and no time was lost in assisting the injured man to the waiting carriage.

Nick Carter shook hands with him and wished him a speedy recovery.

He afterward remarked to the warden:

"The poor fellow appears to be in bad shape. Where does he live?"

"He has boarded with an elderly couple in Green Street for several years."

"A single man, then, I take it."

"Yes. He is a thoroughly reliable man, too, with no bad habits," Warden Gardner warmly added. "Murton Hackett is, in fact, one man in a hundred."

Nick Carter did not say what he thought about it.

CHAPTER III.

HOW NICK SIZED IT UP.

Nick Carter, Chick, and Patsy returned to the Shelby House at eight o'clock that morning. They had their breakfast served in a private room.

"We can kill two birds with one stone," Nick remarked, after they were seated at the table. "We then must begin to get in our work."

"Have you formed any definite opinion?" Chick inquired.

"Yes," Nick said quite emphatically. "Whether I am right, however, remains to be learned. If so, we must obtain positive evidence of it."

"And also round up this gang again," supplemented Patsy.

"Right."

"What do you suspect, or whom?" asked Chick. "It looks very much to me like an inside job."

"I think that hits the nail on the head."

"Do you feel quite sure of it?"

"Reasonably sure," said Nick, smiling a bit oddly. "It could not have been done in a single night from outside. The cooperation of some one within, that of one of the jail officers, would have been almost absolutely necessary. I did not state that to Warden Gardner, however, for he has great confidence in all of his subordinates. He would have derided the mere idea."

"Sure thing, chief," said Patsy. "That was plain enough."

"Furthermore," Nick added, "I could not tell him of my discoveries and suspicions without informing Hackett and the two night officers, or at least incurring their distrust. I wanted to avoid that. There is nothing in letting a culprit know that he is suspected. It puts him doubly on his guard, and sometimes causes him to bolt."

"You suspect one of the night officers, then?"

"I do, Chick, since the work certainly was done in the night. No day man can be reasonably suspected."

"That's true," Chick admitted. "The work would have required more than one night, too, as you have said."

"Surely."

"Who is the guilty man, then? Hackett ought to have been vigilant enough to have detected him. He is the night officer in charge. He would have done so, too, if he had been on to his job."

"That he was not, Chick, is somewhat significant, isn't it?" Nick asked pointedly.

"Why, yes, in a way," Chick allowed, gazing at him. "But what do you mean? You don't imply that you suspect Hackett, do you?"

"That is precisely what I mean," said Nick. "I suspect him more seriously than any one else."

"That he winked at the escape of this gang?"

"More than winked at it, Chick. I suspect that he assisted them."

"And that his knockout was designed only to avert suspicion?"

"Precisely."

"But would he have stood for such rough handling?" Chick questioned doubtfully. "Holy smoke! It seems almost incredible."

"I admit, Chick, that he was effectively knocked out," Nick replied. "But it was done with a sandbag, which very rarely inflicts a serious injury."

"That's true."

"Many a man would stand for that, if impelled with some strong incentive, the assurance of something afterward to be gained," Nick added. "Furthermore, there is no telling just how much of his weakness and apparent insensibility were assumed after Dolan discovered him tied to the cell door. When a man is not suspected, or even thought worthy of suspicion, he can get by with a wonderful amount of deception. Hackett may have faked much of it. As a matter of fact, Chick, I think he did."

"Possibly," Chick allowed, still a bit doubtful. "But what incentive can he have had? These outlaws have no large amount of money with which to have bribed him. They are the worst and cheapest skates in this section of the country."

"Very true," Nick agreed. "Unless I am much mistaken, Chick, Hackett's incentive was not money."

"You suspect——"

"A woman."

"The dickens!" Chick exclaimed, laughing. "He don't look like a lady's man. He's as homely as a hedgehog."

"Yes, and then some," put in Patsy.

"I can imagine that he might become infatuated with a woman, who might promise to yield to his affection in return for services rendered. But what can she have hoped to gain?"

"The liberation of this gang, of course," said Nick.

"H'm! I see."

"Gee! That listens good to me, chief," Patsy declared expressively. "That may explain the tracks we found in the alley."

"Ah, I begin to tumble," said Chick. "You have discovered something that warrants such a theory."

Nick laughed.

"That's about the size of it," he responded.

"Put me wise," Chick rejoined. "Come across with it."

Nick complied by informing him of the evidence found in the alley. That gave Chick the clew that had appealed quite strongly to Nick, and a more serious discussion of the case and what it required immediately followed.

"Do you know of any woman identified with the gang, Nick, who may have led Hackett to such treachery?" Chick inquired.

"No, I do not, That's one of the lines along which we must work. We must dig up the woman, if possible."

"Have you any other reason for suspecting Hackett?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Before he arose from the settee on which he was lying, I noticed that the soles of his shoes near the toes were somewhat scratched," said Nick. "That might have been caused, of course, by walking on the gravel in the jail yard, or on some of the stone steps and stairways."

"Quite likely."

When I examined the copper conductor, however, and noted that an outside confederate might have climbed it, I reasoned that the scratches might have been caused, perhaps, while Hackett was attempting to plant evidence indicating that that really was the case."

"I see," Chick nodded.

"When I examined the wall to which the conductor was attached, however, I found that faint marks on it were discernible only about four feet from the ground, or a height to which any man might have climbed before his strength gave out," Nick proceeded. "I saw plainly enough that no one had climbed the entire length of the conductor. I then began to suspect Hackett, which was further confirmed by the evidence in the alley and the fact that nothing indicated that a visit had been made to the roof."

"You evidently think, nevertheless, that Hackett fixed that hook into the gutter in order that the gang might use the rope as a means for escape."

"I certainly do," Nick admitted. "He would have made sure to leave no evidence of his work. That's why you discovered none. It would have been impossible for the gang to have gone down the stairs and out through the jail corridor. Dolan, or the other night man, would surely have seen or heard them."

"That's true," Chick agreed. "I begin to think you are right."

"It's not enough to merely think so," Nick replied, laying aside his napkin. "Hackett's record up to this time has been a very good one, according to Warden Gardner. In view of his injuries, therefore, a knock-out that very few men would voluntarily suffer, it would be exceedingly difficult to make others credit my suspicions."

"That also is true."

"We must clinch them with tangible evidence, therefore, before revealing them to others," Nick added. "We must find out exactly why the milk is in coconut, why Hackett has turned traitor in this way for the first time in his life."

"That's the stuff, chief," Patsy declared. "Clinch it first and then reveal it."

"There is one other point, mind you, that we must not overlook."

"What's that one, chief"

"My suspicions may be wrong," said Nick. "I may be in error, despite the evidence we have discovered and the deductions I have drawn. The best of us are sometimes mistaken. We will set to work with all of these points in mind, therefore, and try to ferret out the whole truth."

"What are your plans?" Chick inquired.

"I am going to hunt up Hackett's outside record," said Nick. "I want to know with whom he has been asso-

ciated, and whether on the quiet he has any evil habits. I think I may pick up a thread that will lead to an explanation of his conduct."

"Quite likely," Chick nodded.

"In the meantime, Chick, you must keep an eye on the man himself. Find out where he lives and watch the house. If guilty of all I suspect, he soon will seek an interview with the gang, or they with him. In either case, you must be governed by circumstances."

"Trust me for that, Nick."

"Where do I fit in, chief?" questioned Patsy.

"You must hunt up the girl who wears low heels and toes in," said Nick, smiling. "No need to tell you how to proceed."

"Not much need, chief, for fair," said Patsy, with a grin.

"I suspect that she may be one of the strongest links in the chain," Nick added. "Hunt her up at once, therefore, and learn all you can about her."

"I'm with you, chief."

"As for these outlaws, they probably have taken to the woods, or some secret refuge in the foothills, or mountain ravines. They will not venture to Benton Corners, where Jake Hanlon and two of his men live, nor to the home of the Maulers. They know we are familiar with those localities. Wherever they are, however, we must hunt them down. It's up to us to find a way."

CHAPTER IV.

ON A STILL HUNT.

It had required the genius of Nick Carter, as his own remarks had unintentionally implied, to detect evidence and deduce a theory that not only would have escaped the perception of others, but even would be credited by none if brought to their notice.

And it required the persistency of Nick Carter, together with a firm faith in his own discernment, to stick to the theory he had formed and the work he had laid out, in view of the negative results he at first obtained.

For Nick did not find it easy to learn much about Murton Hackett, or anything whatever to his discredit.

He easily learned, of course, that Hackett's duties at the jail kept him employed each night, that he slept at home most of each day, that his habits were good and that he was prudent and thrifty—all of which seemed to give the lie to the theory Nick had formed.

It also led him to visit the Shelby bank, to learn whether Hackett had accumulated any money, and whether he recently had been spending more than usual.

"He may have been blowing it in on the quiet with the unknown woman in this affair," Nick reasoned. "One of his checks might give me a clew to her identity."

The information he obtained at the bank, however, was not what he expected. Nick learned that Hackett had, through an agent, bought a suburban place at auction five days before, on which he had made a payment of one thousand dollars, giving a mortgage of five thousand to cover the purchase.

"I don't know what his intentions are, Mr. Carter," Nick was assured by the bank president, in response to an inquiry. "I hardly think Hackett bought the place for an investment, for it is somewhat isolated and the locality is not desirable. The former owner has been dead for more than a year, moreover, and all of the furniture was afterward sold at auction. The house since has been running down, of course, and I cannot fathom why Hackett wanted it."

Nick did not express an opinion. He then proceeded to visit several furniture stores, however, in two of which he learned that Hackett had, only three days before, been asking about prices for a general line of house furnishings. He had visited both stores alone, however, and Nick could obtain no further information.

"By Jove, this ought to be enough," he said to himself, while returning to the hotel late in the afternoon. "That fellow is out to get married. He has been doing his courting secretly, too, or some one would have mentioned the woman to me. His purchase of a house and inquiries about furniture were both made since the arrest and imprisonment of this outlaw gang. What's the theory? Is he in love with the daughter of one of the outlaws? Has she promised to wed the homely brute, in return for the liberation of the gang? By Jove, that may be the correct explanation."

But further inquiries informed Nick that not one of the outlaw gang had a daughter, which, of course, served to knock that theory on the head.

In the meantime, while Nick Carter was engaged as described, Patsy Garvan was carrying out the instructions of his chief.

Carefully disguised and clad a bit roughly, partly with an idea that something unexpected might occur, and partly because of the fact that all three detectives now were well known by sight in Shelby, Patsy set forth to discover the identity of the girl suspected of being in league with the liberated gang.

Patsy began with inquiries in the numerous shoe stores, as to a customer who was in the habit of having her heels reduced when making a purchase. His quest proved utterly futile, however, for in none of them was any such person known.

Balked along these lines, Patsy then consulted the delivery-window clerk in the post office, with a view to learning whether any family of Indian descent was known to reside in the town, or in the district covered by the rural delivery.

He again met with a total failure, however. The clerk knew of no such family, nor could any of his associates in the office supply the desired information.

Not in the least discouraged, nevertheless, Patsy continued his inquiries until well into the afternoon, pausing only for lunch in a convenient restaurant.

Three o'clock found him consulting a directory in a drug store, bent upon making sure that he had overlooked none of the shoe stores in town.

It was then that he picked up a more promising thread. He found in the business list the name of a cobbler, one Peter Hagan, whose shop was in one of the outskirts of the business district, which had led to Patsy's having overlooked him up to that time.

"Gee, this may be the very man!" he said to himself, after leaving the drug store. "The girl may have her shoes made to order, or she may buy secondhand shoes from him. In that case, if she wanted her heels cut down, she most naturally would seek a cobbler. I'll find out what Peter Hagan knows about the local aborigines. Gee! It's after three o'clock, and I still am about where I started, barring this cobbler possibility."

Patsy found the cobbler's shop in a narrow back street.

It was a low, pitched-roof shanty wedged in between two other buildings. Through the small, dusty window, moreover, he also discovered the cobbler seated at his work, with a last in his lap, and with his aged figure bowed over a boot he was repairing. He was a diminutive, gray-haired man of nearly seventy.

Patsy entered and questioned him more politely than his somewhat rough appearance would have led one to expect.

"Will you do a little job for me, sir, if I leave my shoes here this evening?" he inquired.

The cobbler gazed up through his steel-bowed spectacles and smiled, displaying a double row of toothless gums.

"Well, yes, that's what I'm here for," he replied, with squeaking voice.

"I suppose so," smiled Patsy.

"What is it you want?"

"My feet trouble me and I think my heels are too high," Patsy blandly explained, lifting one foot to show the bottom of his shoe. "I have tried them at nearly all heights, but they seem to bother me a good deal. I now want them cut down to a single lift. I'm going to try walking flat-footed."

The cobbler laughed wheezily.

"You ain't alone," said he, much to Patsy's secret delight.

"How is that, sir?" he inquired.

"Polly Guizot wears her heels that way."

"Cut down to a single lift?"

"Aye."

"And who is Polly Guizot?" asked Patsy, with an air of only indifferent interest.

"She's a girl who lives out yonder a piece," said Peter Hagan, pointing toward an outskirt of the town. "She always brings me her shoes to have the heels fixed. She don't like heels on her shoes."

"Why is that?" Patsy proceeded to inquire. "Most women like high heels."

The cobbler scratched his frowsy head and chuckled, as if the observation amused him.

"They're women of fashion," he replied. "Polly ain't in that class."

"No?"

"If she wore high heels, she'd be likely to pitch over on her nose and break it. That would knock spots out of her pretty face."

"Pretty, is she?" queried Patsy, laughing. "That's another point, Mr. Hagan, that seems in line with what I said. Most pretty girls like to be in fashion."

"Ha, ha! He, he!" Hagan joined in the laugh. "Polly ain't that kind. She knows as little of fashion as a pig does of Greek. She's got Injun blood in her veins."

"Ah, I see!"

"Her father was an Injun, so was her granddad," Hagan went on in a sort of childish way. "I knew both of them. Her dad died about a year ago."

"She lived with him, I suppose?"

"Yep. She's lived all alone since he died. She's the only one that's left of all the family."

"How does she get her living?" questioned Patsy.

"Keeps hens and chickens," said the cobbler tersely. "That's most she does. She keeps them and they keep her. That is, after a fashion. Not in the fashion you were talking of, young man, but Polly's fashion. Bring in your shoes. I'll fix them for you after the same style as Polly's."

"She has a long walk into town, perhaps, to sell her hen fruit," Patsy dryly remarked, bent upon learning just where the girl resided. "That may be why she prefers low heels."

"Well, it's some walk," nodded the cobbler. "But she don't make much bones of it. She lives in the first house after passing the trestle bridge. That's a bit over a mile from here."

"I see."

"But she don't mind a mile or two, not Polly Guizot."

Patsy had learned what he wanted to know. He laughed and nodded, then turned to leave the shop, remarking that he would bring in his shoes the following morning.

CHAPTER V.

POLLY GUIZOT.

Patsy Garvan was not long in deciding what he would do after leaving the shop of the cobbler. He knew very nearly where the trestle bridge was located. He had seen it while on the road to Benton Corners, when he trailed part of this same gang at the home of Jake Hanlon, where Jim Reardon was afterward caught and slain for the murder of the signal-tower operator.

"It's not much more than a mile from town," he said himself. "I can walk there in a quarter hour. I'll have a look at the girl's home and find out whether she is there. I may get a look at the girl herself, as well."

Patsy lost no time in acting upon this decision. He hit the road out of town at a lively pace, soon passing beyond the scattered houses in the outskirt, after which only an occasional small dwelling was to be seen from the rural road.

It was taking him toward Benton Corners and the wooded foothills, and at times he could see through the trees patches of the glistening river spanned by the trestle railway bridge, constructed only for trains over the S. & O. road.

It crossed the river more than a mile from the town, a stream of which Willow Creek was a tributary, the latter in a section rendered notorious by its few lawless inhabitants, and the scene of the express-car robbery nearly two weeks before.

Twenty minutes brought Patsy in sight of the west end of the bridge, which was off to the right from the road, and could be approached only through the woods.

He was brought in view, too, of a small, solitary house about a hundred yards beyond a path making through the woods in the direction of the bridge. It stood in a clearing covering something like an acre, in which were numerous small sheds and scattered hencoops, amid which a quantity of fowl and chickens could be plainly seen.

These, however, were of little interest to Patsy. For he scarce had come in sight of the house than he saw a girl emerge from the back door and turn to lock it, first placing on the ground quite a large wicker-covered basket that she had brought out.

"Gee! There's the girl herself—Polly Guizot," thought Patsy. "She's going somewhere to deliver eggs, or dressed fowl, by the looks. She's coming this way, too. I'll lie low and have one good look at her, at least."

Stealing into the woods while these thoughts flashed through his mind, Patsy easily found concealment amid

some shrubbery a few yards from the path mentioned, and toward which it was quickly apparent that Polly Guizot was heading.

"By Jove, she's going to cross the bridge," Patsy quickly reasoned. "Nothing else would bring her in this direction. She must be going to an upper section of the town, and the bridge cuts off some of the distance. Gee! She's a peach, all right, even if she is of Indian descent."

The girl had left the road, and was striding along the path scarce twenty feet from her interested observer.

She appeared to be about nineteen, of medium height, but with a robust and finely developed figure. Her complexion was dark, but her features had none of the angular, Indian cast. They were finely rounded, and lighted with a pair of large, luminous black eyes, evincing a strong and passionate nature. Her raven hair was bound in great braids over her finely poised head, on which she wore no covering.

She was cheaply clad, moreover, wearing a short, woolen skirt and a flannel waist, exposing her dark, finely formed neck several inches and her robust arms, on one of which she carried the heavy basket as if it was merely a feather.

"Gee! She's some girl, for fair, of the kind," thought Patsy, as she passed quickly by him. "She toes in, all right, and the chief was correct about her heels. He sure gets the right dope most of the time.

"Had I better shadow her? It may be, by Jove, that she is taking that stuff to some of the gang. It may not be easy for them to find fodder. In that case I might discover where they are quartered. I could not trail her over the bridge without being seen, however, and I'd be sure to lose her if I wait until she has crossed. I reckon —— Hello! What's doing? Where did that gink come from?"

Patsy had stealthily followed the girl while indulging in the above train of thought.

Polly had emerged from the woods at the railway track near the end of the trestle bridge, where it met the steep bank of the river.

At the same moment, striding out from some shrubbery on the opposite side of the railway, a man had hurriedly approached and stopped her. He was decently clad in a dark suit, with a soft hat pulled over his brow, and he wore a heavy beard.

When the man halted, confronting the girl, however, Patsy caught sight of a dark bruise on his brow, and he then recognized him despite his disguise.

"Hackett, the deputy warden!" he mentally exclaimed, crouching back of a clump of bushes to watch the couple. "By thunder, he's been lying in wait for this girl. There's going to be something doing."

Patsy was right.

Polly Guizot stepped between the single lines of railway tracks, but without setting down her basket, and she stood darkly confronting the man, with one hand repelling him with a gesture.

Hackett at once began to talk with her, evidently somewhat excited, but the couple were too far away for Patsy to hear what he said.

Plainly enough, nevertheless, the man was expostulating with her over something.

"Gee! I might as well be on the top of the Statue of Liberty," thought Patsy, now anxious to hear what might pass between the couple. "I must take a chance and get nearer to them. There's nothing in mere looking."

Crouching to avoid observation, Patsy stole into the narrow woodland path and gradually crept nearer, until only about twenty yards divided him from the couple. He then could hear plainly what both were saying.

The first words that reached his ears came from the girl, speaking with a sort of sullen and defiant resentment, which also reflected in her dark face.

"You hold your tongue, Murt, and let me go on," she commanded. "I'll not be held up in this way."

"You're not going, Polly, until you answer my question," Hackett darkly insisted. "I have a right to know."

"You'll know when the time comes, not before," the girl retorted.

"I'll know before we part," Hackett cried, with a snarl. "I have a right to know. After what I've done for you ——"

"That cuts no ice with me, now that it's done," snapped Polly. "You're in wrong, Burt. You cannot scare me. You won't dare open your mouth. I'll not be bullied by you. I did——"

"You'll answer my question," Hackett angrily interrupted. "You'll answer it now, too, or I'll know the reason why. Put down that basket. Put it down, or——"

"Don't you lay a hand on me."

The girl drew back, with eyes flashing.

In those of the man Patsy detected the gleam and glitter of jealous frenzy, a light that told of smoldering fire and fury that might impel him to murder, even, if this opposition continued.

Polly Guizot evidently saw it, too, but with no outward sign of fear. Instead of obeying Hackett's threatening command, she gripped the basket tighter, repeating angrily:

"Don't you lay a hand on me. Let me pass."

"Put down the basket," Hackett again commanded.

"I will not. Let me go!"

"Not until you have answered me. You promised——"

"That promise is dead. I am going——"

"You are not going. I'll not bide your time for my answer. You——"

"Let me go."

"No! You black-eyed jade, you shall——"

The girl flung out her hand and struck him in the face.

"Gee! That does settle it!" flashed through Patsy's mind.

It did, indeed, bring the fiery altercation to a climax. The blow seemed to loosen the devil in the man. With a bitter oath, with a snarl like that of a wolf, Hackett leaped at the girl and seized her by the throat.

She staggered, lost her footing, and dropped her basket, and then, with all the desperation of utter terror, she undertook to oppose him and put up a fight.

Patsy saw at a glance, however, that she was no match for the angry man. His brain went into a riot for a moment, though he did not pause for an instant.

All the contingencies of the situation flashed up before him—the possibility of being suspected as Nick's assistant, the loss of this opportunity to trail the girl and discover the whereabouts of the gang, the risk that his interference might be resented, and that all the advantage he had gained might be lost.

On the other hand, however, Patsy saw greater advantages to be gained, as presently appeared, and upon which he was eager to seize despite the perils they involved; and

he realized, too, that the girl might be throttled to death unless he prevented it.

All of these features of the situation flashed through Patsy's mind in the hundredth part of a second.

In that hundredth part of a second, too, he was bounding down the path at top speed, uttering not a sound, but reaching the struggling couple before the brutal hands of the man had inflicted any serious injury upon the frightened girl.

With designs already shaped up in his mind, Patsy had no idea of resorting to words.

His right arm flew back when he reached the couple. His fist shot out and fell with a crash upon Hackett's jaw, a blow delivered with indignation so genuine and deep that the force of it might have felled an ox.

Hackett had not seen Patsy coming, and as a matter of fact he never knew what struck him.

He went down as if hit with a club, with every muscle and finger relaxing. He rolled headlong and insensible down the incline at one side of the track, where he remained lying among the weeds and bushes, down and out and dead to the world for some time to come.

Polly Guizot pulled herself together and stared at Patsy, as if he were a man suddenly and mysteriously risen out of the ground.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE LION'S MOUTH.

Patsy Garvan, despite the excitement of the sensational episode just enacted, already had decided upon the course he would shape.

Patsy had foreseen that he might turn the incident to material advantage. He did not stop to consider the perils involved—those were of secondary consideration.

It was enough for Patsy Garvan, always, that he could expedite the work engaging his chief, let the peril be what it might.

Turning to Polly Guizot, who still was gasping for breath and hastily arranging her disordered garments, Patsy asked indignantly, in terms well calculated to favorably impress the girl:

"Who is this gink, anyway? What's he trying to put over on you? Say the word, miss, and I'll kick his block off."

Polly gazed at him for a moment with a strange look in her somber black eyes. She felt a keen appreciation of the service rendered. It was not in her nature to be demonstrative, or to verbally thank him at all profusely, but her eyes spoke volumes.

She did not reply for a moment. She walked down the slope of the roadbed, stopping among the bushes where Hackett was lying insensible under the blow he had received, and she deliberately kicked him twice, with a look of scorn on her darkly passionate face. She then returned to the tracks where Patsy was standing.

"That's what I think of him," she said coldly, with another swift glance at the prostrate man. "He's a woodchuck, a skunk. But who are you?"

"I ain't much of anybody," Patsy replied tentatively. "My name is Horrigan."

"Horrigan?"

"That's what."

"But what brought you here at just this time?"

"I'm heading for Shelby, and was going over the bridge," Patsy glibly explained.

"Ah!"

"I came down the path just as that guy called you down for something, the devil knows what and I care less. Then I saw him grab you—and that settled it."

"Settled it?"

"You bet!"

"That don't settle it, Horrigan," replied the girl, with a grateful ring stealing into her voice. "That don't settle it. Say, what's your front name?"

"Mike," said Patsy promptly. "Mike Horrigan, miss."

"That don't settle it, Mike," Polly Guizot repeated, steadily gazing at him.

"Well, I've settled him, miss, at all events. That ought to be good enough."

"He's no good."

"That's what I reckoned."

Polly held out her hand and came nearer. And when Patsy took and pressed it for a moment, she said simply:

"You're my friend from now on. Going over the bridge, Mike?"

"Sure."

"Come. I'm going that way."

"What about——" Patsy glanced at Hackett, still in dreamland.

"Carrion! Let him be! Come with me."

Patsy consented readily. He was more than willing to do so, and it was precisely on what he had been figuring. He was bent upon working his way into the very midst of the gang he was seeking, if possible, regardless of the risk of recognition and a bullet through his heart.

He glanced at Hackett again, too, remarking indifferently:

"He'll brighten up, all right, give him time. Let me carry your basket."

Polly shook her head and hung the basket over her arm.

"I'm used to it," she replied. "I wouldn't feel like myself without it. Come on, Mike, if you're going my way."

They left Hackett lying where he had fallen, and started over the bridge together, stepping from tie to tie in unison.

Patsy did not press the advantage he had gained.

He waited for the girl to speak.

"Live in Shelby?" she asked tersely, after a brief silence.

Patsy nodded.

"Some of the time," said he. "I also hang out in Amherst sometimes. I'm hoofing it up there, now, not having the price of a ride."

"Looking for work?"

"Yes, in a way, though I'm not straining my eyes," said Patsy. "Work and me ain't too good friends."

Polly laughed.

She appeared to have forgotten Hackett and the episode in which she had figured. She appeared, in fact, to be so favorably impressed with Patsy as to be eager to make a friend of him; and to that he was by no means averse—temporarily.

"Mebbe you'd rather do something else," she said suggestively.

"Something else?"

"Than work."

"That's what," Patsy allowed, with an expressive grin. "Most anything beats working."

Polly laughed again.

"I like you," she announced frankly. "I wish you wasn't going up to Amherst."

"Oh, I ain't fussy to go," Patsy said quickly. "There's no string on me. I like you, too. I'd hang round here for a time, all right, if there was anything doing."

"What do you mean—anything doing?"

"So I could make both ends meet," Patsy artfully explained. "A gink must eat, you know."

"You ain't hungry, are you?" questioned Polly quickly.

"Why?"

"Because I've got stuff here you can have."

"In the basket?"

"Yes."

"I wouldn't take it from you," said Patsy, shaking his head. "I'm no piker who looks to lift a yellow sleeper while he plays a white chip. I'll get mine, all right, by some hook or crook."

"You ain't a crook, are you?"

Polly gazed at him hopefully, not a little mystified by his remarks.

"Well, I'm going around this town, instead of through it," Patsy replied significantly. "But you wouldn't like a crook, would you?" he added.

"I might," said Polly, with somber simplicity. "There's worse in the world."

She glanced back over her shoulder with a scowl settling briefly on her dark brow.

Patsy knew that she referred to Hackett.

"That's right, too," he agreed. "That gink ought to be chucked in the river. Are you heading for home?"

"No."

"Where are you taking the stuff in the basket?" Patsy carelessly questioned. "You don't go looking for handouts, do you?"

Polly laughed again.

"No," she said shortly. "I'm taking it to some friends."

"Sold it?"

"No."

"A gift?"

"Yes."

"You'd be some friend to a covey ," said Patsy warmly. "But I ain't burdened with friends. I've had to go it alone most of the time since I was knee-high to a grasshopper."

"You don't stay long in one place, do you?" questioned the girl.

"No, not long. That's why, mebbe, I don't make many friends."

Polly eyed him askance, then said suggestively:

"If you stay round here for a time you might find friends."

"If I thought that, miss, I'd anchor here," Patsy quickly declared.

"Would you?"

"I sure would."

"You might be too particular," said the girl.

"Beggars ain't often choosers," returned Patsy. "I'd make up with any covey of the right sort. There ain't nothing worse than being alone all the time."

"Are you alone?"

"I sure am."

Patsy saw plainly that the girl mistook him for a tramp, or a vagabond bent upon getting his living by his wits, if not worse methods, and he had directed the conversation accordingly. The outcome of it was precisely what he expected, in so far as the girl was concerned. That she was simple and ignorant, with no great degree of native shrewdness, were obvious to him from the first, and he felt no compunctions over deceiving her in order to serve the interests of justice.

Patsy was not surprised, therefore, when she turned to him and announced, in reply to his last remark:

"I can fix you with some friends."

"You can?" he asked, gazing at her.

"Yes."

"Your friends?"

"Yes."

"That sounds good to me," said Patsy eagerly.

"But you might not like them."

"Any friends of yours would be good enough for me. Say, what's your name?"

"Polly Guizot," she said, with a flush rising in her dark cheeks. "Why wouldn't I tell you mine? You told me yours."

"Sure I did," nodded Patsy. "But your friends might not fancy me."

"They will after I have told them about you."

"Told them what?"

"What you did back there," said Polly, evincing how deeply it had impressed her. "They like men, of your kind. They have a use for them."

"What use, Polly?"

"You'll learn—if you're not too particular."

"That be hanged! I'm game for any kind of work, Polly, barring hard work. Where are your friends?"

"Where I'm going."

"But they may turn me down and kick me out," said Patsy, with affected uncertainty.

"No." Polly quickly shook her head. "Besides, I'll tell them you're a friend of mine. They'll not guess that we just met for the first time."

"You'll do that, will you?"

"If you want to stay with us."

"I sure do," said Patsy, with manifest satisfaction. "You're all right, Polly, and I wish I'd given that gink a second jolt on the jaw. I'll hang round here as long as I'm welcome. When I'm not, I'll get out as quick as I came in. Is that a train coming?"

The whistle of a locomotive was heard from the distant woods behind them, and both gazed back for a moment. The smoke from the approaching train could be seen above the trees.

"Yes," Polly said quickly. "We must hurry."

"Come on, then," cried Patsy. "I'm with you."

They were almost across the trestle bridge, in fact, and near the bank on the Shelby side of the railway.

Moderate haste was imperative, however, lest they should be caught on the narrow bridge, and Patsy took advantage of it to rid himself unobserved of several articles in his pockets which, if discovered on his person, would surely reveal his identity.

A pair of handcuffs, an electric searchlight, a steel twister, several personal letters—Patsy dropped all of these between the ties over which he was hurrying just behind the girl, and he saw them fall into the river. He retained only his revolver, in fact, the carrying of such a weapon being general in that section.

"Now, by Jove, if my disguise proves effective, I'll risk finding a way to fool this gang and land them where they belong. How Hackett fits in is more than I can guess, but it's a cinch that this girl has duped him in some way.

"That's up to me to find out, along with all the rest, and a way to get word to the chief. I'd give something to know just where this jade is taking me."

The last was called up in Patsy's mind by the fact that the country on that side of the river was more wild and thickly wooded than that from which he had come.

He could see no sign of any habitation, nor even a path through the dense woods, aside from that formed by the railway.

The girl led the way from the bridge, and both waited until the train had passed and swept around to the south in the direction of Shelby.

Then, turning to Patsy, Polly Guizot said shortly:

"Come on!"

"Up the track?"

"Yes, a piece."

It proved to be less than a hundred yards. The girl then struck into the woods to the north, following a path with which she evidently was familiar. Less than half a mile brought a narrow road into view away off to the right, while over the trees ahead Patsy then could see the roof and chimneys of quite a large house, evidently overlooking a part of the river hidden from the trestle bridge by a broad curve.

"That must be her pulling-up place," he said to himself. "Is the entire gang here? Have all hands sought refuge in this isolated house? I hope so, by ginger, for all that the odds will be eight to one, counting Jaset Payson. But what of that?" Patsy mentally added, not daunted for a moment. "I'm good for those odds every day in the week."

The bold course Patsy Garvan had taken was, nevertheless, one leading into a lion's mouth.

CHAPTER VII.

PATSY'S MISHAP.

It was a large, square house that met Patsy's gaze when they came to the edge of the clearing in which it was situated. It overlooked the river, and evidently occupied a wooded estate of vast extent, being the only sign of habitation in that vicinity.

Strange to say, however, or so it seemed to Patsy, the house appeared to be vacant.

There were no curtains at the windows. Many of the shutters were closed. The lawns had run to rank grass and weeds. The fences were out of repair and down in places. Weeds were growing in the gravel driveway, and though the house was a large one, and evidently once was that of a person of means, it now had a look of utter desolation.

"Gee! Is this where your friends hang out, Polly?" Patsy questioned, as they were emerging from the woods.

"Yes, just now."

"What brought them here?"

"Don't you be too inquisitive until you know more about them," Polly advised. "Take a tip from what you hear me say."

"Oh, I'll not butt in," Patsy assured her.

"I'm doing this, Mike, for what you did for me."

"I'm wise to that, Polly, and you're all right."

"Lay hold of the basket, now, and help me lug it," said Polly, shifting it from her arm, so that Patsy could grasp the handle. "Let me do the talking at first."

"Good for you, girlie," Patsy hurriedly nodded, not in the least averse to her doing so. "I'll be dumb for a time."

She nodded approvingly. It was evident that she had taken a fancy to him, for she flushed again with a side glance from under her long lashes. She then threw back her head and uttered a quick, shrill whistle.

She had conducted Patsy around a path toward the rear of the house, and until then he had not seen a sign of life on the place.

The whistle, however, was a signal. The bulkhead door of a basement was almost immediately raised, and a human head cautiously appeared above the stone steps leading into a large, dry cellar.

It was quickly followed by another, and two men then strode out and approached to meet the girl.

Patsy recognized them instantly.

"Jeff Murdock and Dick Bryan," he said to himself. "It's odds, too, that all of the gang are here. I've called the turn, all right, but can I now make good?"

That it might prove difficult appeared in the ugly look that had risen to Murdock's face. Dick Bryan, however, had immediately seized Polly in his arms and kissed her.

"Wait!" she exclaimed. "There'll be time enough for that."

"Who is this fellow, Poll?" Murdock harshly demanded, gazing suspiciously at Patsy's rather sinister face. "Why have you brought him here?"

"Oh, he's all right, Jeff," Polly hastened to assure him. "He helped me lug our basket of grub. He's a friend of mine, and wants to be a friend of yours. His name is Mike Horrigan."

"Does he live around here?" Bryan asked, also gazing at Patsy.

"Over yonder," nodded Polly, pointing indefinitely. "Ain't my word good? I know he's all right."

"But does he know where we came from?"

"Sure he does, Jeff," said the girl. "He knows all about the escape. He'll never yip. Would you, Mike?"

"Never a yip from me," said Patsy, quickly shaking his head. "I ain't that kind of a gink. I wouldn't blow on a friend no more than I'd cut my head off."

"Well, that sounds all right," said Murdock, evidently relieved.

"Are you acquainted in Shelby?" questioned Bryan.

"Sure I am," Patsy asserted.

"By Jove, we may make use of him, Jeff, in that case," said Bryan, turning to the chief of the gang.

"Use of him, Dick?"

"We could send him into town to nose around for us and bring us such articles and information as we want," Bryan explained. "It's not safe for any of us to show up there."

"There is something in that," Murdock admitted, regarding Patsy more favorably. "Could you do that for us?"

"Sure I could do it,' said Patsy readily. "I'm no birdhead."

"And would you do it?" Murdock added.

"That or anything else you want," Patsy assured him. "I'm game, you'll find, when it comes to a show-down."

"Good enough, then. Bring in the basket, Polly. We're as hungry as sharks. Come with us, Horrigan, and I'll talk more with you," Murdock directed.

Patsy grabbed up the heavy basket before Polly could take it, and he then followed Murdock down the low flight of stone steps and into the basement.

The scene that met his gaze was about what he expected. It now was obvious that the gang had sought temporary refuge in an empty, isolated house, in which there were no furnishings for their needs.

A quantity of hay had been brought in from a stable back of the house. It was thickly spread upon part of the basement floor, and had served the outlaws for a bed after their flight of the previous night.

Three of the others then were sleeping soundly—Jake Hanlon, Link Magee, and Sol Mauler.

Janet Payson was seated on an empty box, with her head bowed on her knees.

Zeke Mauler, Patsy afterward learned, was on the lookout in one of the upper rooms, the window of which commanded a distant view of the road approaching the place from Shelby.

Patsy saw, too, that most of the ruffian's were armed, and it later appeared that the weapons were provided by Polly.

Patsy now heard her telling Murdock and Bryan what had befallen Hackett. She was misrepresenting the facts, however, in a way to fit the statements she had just made concerning her companion.

Her story, moreover, was not without effect upon the two ruffians. Both now shook hands with Patsy, expressing their approval of what he had done, and intimating that he would be a welcome addition to the gang, all of which appeared to suit Patsy to the letter.

"You gave the infernal rat what he deserved," Dick Bryan declared. "I'd have done more for him, blast his picture!"

"You don't like him, I reckon," said Patsy, with a grin.

"Like him be hanged!" cried Bryan. "Not much! He's crazy to marry Polly, you see, and Polly Guizot is my girl."

"Ah, that explains it!"

"He's nutty over her," Bryan added. "He'd jump off the earth for her, if she told him to. We have made the most of that, all right."

"How so?" questioned Patsy, with manifest interest.

"We put up a job on him," Bryan explained. "Polly promised to marry him in return for his helping us to slip out of that infernal Shelby calaboose. She promised him for my sake, being in love with me, and wanting to get me out. Hackett didn't suspect the job, and he fell for Polly's promise. He even bought this place to live in with her. Got it at auction eight days ago. Ain't that rich?" added Bryan, grinning derisively.

Patsy laughed as if he thought it a joke, but in reality was having discovered the true inwardness of the existing circumstances.

"Ain't you afraid that Hackett might squeal, boss, after what has happened to-day?" he questioned, turning to Murdock after talking with Bryan a few moments longer.

"Afraid of it, Horrigan? Why?" asked Murdock, again eying him more sharply.

"He might," argued Patsy tentatively.

Murdock seemed impressed with this display of interest, for he quickly shook his head.

"He can't squeal," he insisted.

"Why can't he?"

"He would only get himself in a worse mess."

"Don't he know you are here?"

"No, of course not," put in Bryan, with a growl. "We wouldn't have been fools enough to have put him wise to our coming here. This is only a temporary refuge, mind you."

"I see," nodded Patsy, apparently willing to drop the subject.

He knew that he had set the ball rolling, however, along lines that would serve his purpose.

This appeared a moment later, when Murdock turned to him again and said:

"There is only one man we fear, Horrigan."

"Who is that, boss?" questioned Patsy, as if with reawakened interest.

"Nick Carter—and his assistants."

"Have they been put on the case?"

"Yes, of course," Murdock declared with a growl.

"I heard something about it," Patsy admitted. "He's a bad man to have on your trail."

"You bet he is!" snarled Bryan.

"We don't know that he has struck our trail. That's the trouble," Murdock said a bit gloomily after a moment.

"You don't know?"

"Not yet. He never shows his hand, blast him, till he shows it with a gun thrust under your nose."

"So I've heard," nodded Patsy.

"I'd give something to know just how he has sized up the whole business, and what he is doing."

"You can find out easy enough, boss," said Patsy, as if hit with a sudden idea.

"What do you mean? How?"

"If he is on the right track, he would suspect Hackett, wouldn't he?" asked Patsy.

"Yes, of course," Murdock allowed.

"And most likely would be watching him, wouldn't he?"

"That seems reasonable."

"Sure thing!" put in Bryan. "It's a cinch."

"I'll tell you how it can be done, then," said Patsy, more earnestly.

"Out with it."

"Let Polly send Hackett a letter, boss, asking him to meet her here to-night. He'll come, all right, if you frame up a proper letter, you can bet on that. I know from what Bryan says about him and what came off this afternoon."

"Well, what then?" Murdock demanded.

"If Carter is watching Hackett, he'll shadow him here, of course. You then can lie low and nail him, if you want to. Even if you don't do that, it would show you where you stand, and put you on your guard."

"By thunder! There is something in that," cried Murdock, quick to the possibilities of the suggestion.

This was, of course, only a shrewd scheme on Patsy's part to bring Chick there to aid him, a subterfuge that might thus serve his purpose.

Patsy knew that the gang would surely seize and secure Chick, but he did not doubt that he could afterward liberate him stealthily, and that together they could contrive to hold up and secure the entire outlaw gang.

"What d'ye think of it?" he asked, after a moment.

"It looks all right," Murdock thoughtfully declared. "I'm thinking it over to find the weak points."

"I'll be hanged if I can see any," Dick Bryan asserted. "It's the real thing, as I look at it."

The suggestion had, as a matter of fact, hit both Murdock and Bryan as forcibly as Patsy had hoped.

Both thought so well of it that they now aroused the rest of the gang to tell them about it, and to introduce them to—Horrigan.

Polly Guizot readily consented to go into town and write the treacherous letter, a draft of which was immediately made, and to send it to Hackett's lodgings, not doubting that he would have arrived home by that time.

The letter was to read as follows:

"DEAR MURT: I am very sorry for what came off this afternoon. We was both of us to blame, but me more than you. I will do what is right by you. Meet me at the Barker place as soon as possible. I'll slip over the trestle bridge and be waiting for you back of the house. Come as soon as you get this, Murt. POLLY."

It was five o'clock when the treacherous girl set forth alone for town to carry out this design, or set it in operation.

Something like half an hour later, while leaving the basement in company with Murdock and others of the gang, who were then in advance of him, Patsy accidentally hit his head slightly against the top of the low doorway through which he was passing.

The blow was sufficient, nevertheless, to displace his disguise for a moment. He hurriedly adjusted it, then glanced quickly around to find out whether any had seen the mishap.

Janet Payson, lying on the hay in one corner of the room, escaped his notice. She alone had seen the make-up—and had instantly recognized the detective.

As quickly, too, she pretended to be asleep.

She presently arose and stole out, however, and quietly informed Jeff Murdock.

Something like five minutes later, Patsy Garvan was indescribably surprised at finding himself seized from behind by no less than five of the gang, by whom he was quickly bound, his revolver stolen, and the disguise whipped from his face

"Holy smoke! It's all off!" was his first thought. "These dogs are on to my curves—and I've lured Chick into a trap from which the devil himself can't save him!"

Patsy Garvan was right.

It seemed to him at that moment that it was the worst mess he had ever made.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DOUBLE HOLDUP.

Chick Carter, it will be remembered, had been detailed by Nick to keep an eye upon the possible movements of Murton Hackett, after the deputy warden was sent home in a carriage from the jail that morning, pretending to be in no shape to afterward leave the house.

He had arrived home before the detectives left the jail, in fact, from which they departed to breakfast in the Shelby House and to hold the discussion and lay the plans set forth in a previous chapter, the outcome of which has in part been depicted.

Because of these delays, it was after ten o'clock that morning when Chick, in accord with Nick's instructions, arrived in the neighborhood of Hackett's lodging house to begin the espionage directed.

Naturally, of course, Chick supposed that the man then was in the house, that he would not have left it so soon after his return from the jail.

As a matter of fact, however, Hackett had departed in disguise within half an hour, after making to his landlady an explanation the nature of which will later appear.

Chick easily found a vantage point from which he could watch both doors of the house, little dreaming that the bird already had flown.

He expected that his vigil was likely to be a long one. He reasoned that Hackett would not leave before evening, perhaps, if he then had any incentive to doing so. It was equally obvious, also, or appeared to be, that none of the liberated outlaws, or any emissary from them, would venture to call upon Hackett for several hours at least.

Chick was not surprised, therefore, when hour after hour went by without bringing anything to reward his constant vigilance.

Late in the afternoon, however, came something to relieve the monotony of vain watching. The something was a rather roughly clad man, wearing a full beard, who came up the street and entered the house as if he dwelt there.

His attire was so different from that worn in the jail, however, and the fact that Chick did not catch sight of his bruised brow, as Patsy had done, that the former failed to recognize him.

The man was Hackett himself, returning home after his interview with Polly Guizot and his knock-out by Patsy.

"He may be the landlord, or some other lodger," thought Chick, after the door had closed upon his slouching figure. "He certainly lives there, or he would not have entered with a key."

Chick continued watching.

Half an hour later, just as the dusk of the evening was beginning to gather, another person called at the house.

It was a youngster about ten years of age, who rang the bell and gave the landlady a letter—the letter to Hackett, written by Polly Guizot.

Instead of venturing to the house herself, she had paid the boy to deliver the missive, and then she had hastened back to await the outcome of Patsy's ruse, little dreaming what had occurred since her departure.

Scarce five minutes later, Chick saw the same slouchily clad, bearded man emerge from the house and hurry away.

"By thunder, that's Hackett himself!" he mentally exclaimed, now having had a better look at his face. "He has been out before, was out most of the time I have been here. By Jove, there must be something back of all this! The letter brought by that lad was for him. He now is leaving in response to it. Well, well, this will beat hanging around here in idleness. I'll find out where he is going and for what. It's odds of a hundred to one that that letter came from one of the gang. He now is off to hold an interview with them, or I am much mistaken."

Chick had immediately taken up the trail while thus sizing up the circumstances. Falling in some thirty yards behind his quarry, Chick proceeded to shadow him.

Hackett struck straight for a northern section of the town, beyond the outskirt of which he had passed before the dusk began to deepen.

For he was walking rapidly, filled with a hope that the missive from Polly had inspired.

Chick followed him cautiously, but with no great diffi-

tuity, for the man evidently had no thought that he was suspected and might be shadowed.

Not knowing what Patsy had learned and what had befallen him, moreover, Chick unconsciously was working under an even greater disadvantage than his quarry.

There could be, in so far as he was concerned, only one result to the situation that had developed.

Chick walked squarely into the trap that Patsy inadvertently had set for him.

Hackett had made a bee line, in fact, for the Barker place, knowing that Polly knew of his having bought it. He was not surprised at the rendezvous she had appointed, therefore, but he did not dream that the outlaws had sought temporary refuge in the deserted old house, which they had done at the girl's suggestion.

Chick saw him hurry up the long, weed-grown gravel driveway and disappear around a rear corner of the house, his figure dimly discernible in the bright starlight.

But Chick did not know what immediately followed, for he was too far away to hear the low, threatening commands that had greeted the treacherous warden.

For Hackett was promptly held up under the muzzles of two revolvers, in the hands of Sol and Zeke Mauler, and threatened with instant death if he opened his mouth.

Hackett did not open it.

He was quickly seized and rushed into the basement, where he was securely bound and gagged in less time than one could describe the operation.

In the meantime, nevertheless, for the plans of the rascals had been carefully laid, the unexpected had happened to the detective.

Heading up the driveway in pursuit of his quarry, Chick had covered scarce twenty paces, when four men leaped out from some shrubbery on either side, and as many revolvers instantly covered him.

They were Magee, Hanlon, and Bryan, with Jeff Murdock in advance.

"Throw up your hands!" cried the last harshly. "Up with them, or you'll be a dead one!"

Chick was too surprised to venture any aggressive move. He could not then conceive how the situation had come about.

He knew positively that Hackett had not lured him into any such trap.

Up went Chick's hands, therefore, though he said curtly and with unruffled coolness:

"Point those guns another way, you fellows, if it's all the same to you. One of them might go off by chance. I'm not fool enough to buck up against such a bunch as you."

"They'll go off, all right, Carter, if you drop your hands or attempt to put up a fight," snapped Murdock, with eyes gleaming in the starlight.

"I want a look-in, Murdock, when I fight," Chick said dryly.

"Well, you'll not get it here."

"That goes without saying."

"Go behind him, Dick, and get his weapons," Murdock commanded. "We'll keep him covered."

"I'll get them all right," cried Bryan, hastening to obey.

"If he's got any handcuffs on him, put them on his own dukes," Murdock quickly added.

"You'll find them in my hip pocket," Chick said, with defiant coolness.

"And you'll find them on your wrists in half a minute, and on to stay," Bryan retorted, while he drew out the irons and proceeded to carry out his threat.

"Now, boys, we'll run him up to the house and get him under cover," said Murdock exultantly, after the detective had been disarmed and secured.

"That's the stuff!" chimed in Magee. "We've got two of them, all right."

"And we'll soon get the third," snarled Hanlon, forcing Chick up the driveway. "We'll teach the infernal dicks to come down here after us."

"Great guns!" thought Chick, listening. "Can it be that they have nailed Nick, or Patsy? It must be, though it seems incredible."

Chick was not left in doubt, however, when he entered the dimly lighted basement.

The first person on whom his gaze fell was Patsy Garvan.

CHAPTER IX.

IN CLOSE PURSUIT.

"There is something wrong, by Jove, or one of them would have showed up by this time, or have sent me some word. There has been a slip-up of some kind."

It was in the mind of Nick Carter that these thoughts arose, when, soon after six o'clock and the approach of the dinner hour at the Shelby House, he long had been vainly waiting for the return of Patsy, or some communication from Chick.

His uncertainty concerning them disturbed him too seriously for him to care for dinner. Instead, he abruptly arose and strode out of the hotel, at once heading for Green Street and the home of the deputy warden.

"I'll find out whether Chick still is watching the house," he said to himself. "If not, Hackett must have made a move of some kind. There certainly is some reason for the absence of Patsy till this hour."

Nick covered the distance in a very few minutes.

He arrived at the lodging house precisely half an hour after the departure of Hackett, with Chick on his trail.

Failing to find Chick, of course, Nick determined to go a step farther.

"I'll see whether the rascal is in the house," he said to himself. "If so, I will pretend that I have called to inquire about his injuries. In view of Chick's absence, however, it's ten to one that Hackett has gone out."

Nick mounted the steps and rang the bell.

The summons was answered by the landlady, one Mrs. Ball, who politely informed the detective that Hackett had gone out half an hour before.

"He was hurt in the jail last night, sir, but has been out most of the day," she added, in response to a remark from Nick about the man's injuries.

"Most of the day, eh?" queried Nick, supposing, of course, that Chick would have followed him and reported. "Are you sure of that, madam?"

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Carter," she replied, Nick having introduced himself. "He went out in disguise about an hour after he came from the jail."

"In disguise?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was that for?"

"Oh, he often does that, sir," smiled the woman. "He says it is part of his duty to look out for crooks, and he

don't want them to recognize him. He often goes out evenings in disguise."

Nick scented the rat in the meal. He had wondered that no person had mentioned Hackett's relations with Polly Gulzot, or the woman he suspected of being in the case. Nick now came to the correct conclusion that Hackett had been conducting his love affair in disguise, and thus had explained his conduct to his landlady.

"At what time did he return?" Nick inquired. "You say he went out early in the day."

"Yes, sir," bowed Mrs. Ball. "He came in about six, sir, and went out again half an hour later."

"In disguise?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"He did not, sir. But I think he went out because of a letter he received."

"When?"

"Just before he left, sir. It was brought here by a boy, and I took it up to Mr. Hackett's room."

Nick's mind was working more rapidly. These circumstances further convinced him there was something wrong.

"Show me up to his room, madam," he said gravely. "I wish to see that letter, if it is there. It is quite possible that he has left it."

"Will it be right for me to do so, sir?" Mrs. Ball demurred.

Nick assured her that she would make no mistake in obeying him, and she then conducted him to a neatly furnished room on the second floor. A search on the table and in the bureau drawers, however, failed to bring the letter to light.

Nick was about turning from the room, a bit disappointed, when he caught sight of a wastebasket in one corner. He hastened to examine it, while the woman remarked:

"I emptied that this morning, Mr. Carter. I hardly think you will find it there."

"On the contrary, my dear woman, here it is, torn in small fragments," Nick cried, with manifest satisfaction. "If you emptied the basket this morning, this should be the letter. Furthermore, the paper and writing speak for themselves."

"Well, well, you must be right," said the woman, gazing.

Nick had dumped the torn fragments on the top of the table.

"Be patient a little longer," said he. "I must know of what this communication consists."

"I am in no hurry, sir."

Nick sat down and set to work matching the torn edges of the fragments of paper. In less than ten minutes he had the entire letter matched up, and had fixed the communication in his mind. It was sufficiently significant, in view of all of the other circumstances, to start him on the right track.

Nick left the house at once, and hastened to the police station. He found the sergeant in charge, also Sheriff Norton in the outer office.

"Why, hello, Carter!" exclaimed the sheriff. "What brought you here?"

"Shanks' mare, Norton," laughed Nick. Then, more seriously: "Do you know just where the Barker place is located?"

"The one Hackett bought at auction ten days ago?"

"The same."

"Yes, certainly."

"Where is it?"

"Near two miles above here on the river. It's been vacant a year."

"Got half a dozen reliable men here, sergeant?" Nick demanded, abruptly turning to him.

"I can have them here in five minutes," said the sergeant, with a stare of amazement.

"And a big touring car?"

"Surely."

"Do so, then," Nick directed. "Let all of them be well armed. Have plenty of bracelets, also. I think we shall need them."

"Good heavens!" cried the sheriff. "Where are you going, Carter? What's in the wind?"

"In the wind be hanged!" said Nick dryly. "They are in the Barker house, instead. Unless I am much mistaken, Norton, we shall capture the entire gang that escaped last night from the county jail."

"Whoop!" Norton shouted. "Count me in on this!"

"Great Scott! That will be speedy service, indeed," cried the sergeant.

"Get a move on, then," Nick commanded. "We'll get away quickly. It must be done on the quiet."

There was no great delay. Less than ten minutes had passed when the huge motor car, containing Nick, Norton, and five officers, sped out of the town and headed for the suspected refuge of the outlaws.

When out of the town, Nick ordered all of the lights extinguished, and the silent steed sped on in a gloom relieved only by the light of the stars.

The car went much faster than the two men who had covered the same distance on foot only a little more than half an hour before.

It arrived in view of the Barker place within ten minutes after Chick and Hackett had been held up and taken into the basement, and the crooks had not yet taken the precaution to close the bulkhead door of the dimly lighted cellar.

Nick Carter caught a glimpse of it from the distant road.

"Stop here, driver," he commanded, addressing one of the officers. "We will leave the car here. By the looks of yonder light, I think we shall find the rats in the cellar."

"God grant it!" Norton muttered. "It will be them for the county jail again, in that case, and in to stay."

"We'll try to reach the door unheard," Nick quietly added, at once leading the way. "If we slip in that, make a rush for it and have your guns ready. Shoot to kill, too, if it comes to shooting."

"You bet!" muttered several.

They stole in a body through the intervening woods and across the rank lawns. There was no sentinel outside, no one to oppose them.

They gathered around the open door and awaited a glance from Nick.

The voice of Murdock, raised in vicious exultation, could be plainly heard from within. He was addressing Chick and Patsy, both then securely bound.

"We've got you and will finish you," he was saying. "We'll get your chief, too, and will finish him. No infernal sleuth from New York shall get the best of us. We'll down him and you and——"

Nick waited no longer.

"At them now, lads!" he shouted, leaping down the steps and into the basement. "No mercy for him who shows fight. Up with your hands, you fellows, all of you! We'll shoot to kill."

The scene that followed was brief and sensational.

The half dozen officers poured in after Nick like bees into a hive.

A momentary chill of dismay fell upon the outlaws, and held them motionless.

Then a yell broke from Murdock and a roar from Jake Hanlon.

The former leaped toward the lamp to dash it from its shelf, hoping to escape in the darkness.

Nick's revolver barked on the instant.

Murdock pitched over on the floor with a bullet in his breast.

Sheriff Norton saw Hanlon reach for a weapon, and he at once shot him through the head. The brawny ruffian fell without so much as a groan.

There were shouts and cries and shrieks of excitement, however, but the fall of these two men took all of the fight out of the others. The hands of every man went into the air, and were not lowered till they were lowered in irons.

All that ensued may be briefly told. The transfer of the bandits to the jail was made without special incident, and they were safely lodged in the institution from which they had escaped less than twenty-four hours before. It was, indeed, as the police sergeant had said, speedy service, and all through the work of Nick Carter and his two assistants.

There was no second escape. One and all of the culprits met his just deserts, two of them dying of the wounds they had received.

The treacherous deputy warden, whose conduct and incentive already have been made sufficiently clear, was no exception in the trial that soon followed. He went to the State's prison with the others, and most of them are there to this day.

Their incarceration ended the crimes and outrages along the S. & O. Railroad, from which the Carters received a handsome reward for their services, and it ended Nick Carter's work in and around Shelby.

THE END.

"Work by Magic; or, Nick Carter's Mysterious Ear," will be the title of the next issue of THE NICK CARTER STORIES, No. 133, out March 27th. In the forthcoming story some of the most entertaining adventures of Nick Carter and his assistants are narrated.

FORCING THE SEASON.

Mother—"What? Been in swimming? And this time of the year? Mercy! When I went out to-day I wore my winter coat."

Little Johnny (with teeth chattering)—"Yes'm, it was so—so—cold we ha-had to jum-jump into the wa-water to kee-keep warm."

ON A DARK STAGE.

By ROLAND ASHFORD PHILLIPS.

(This interesting story was commenced in No. 127 of NICK CARTER STORIES. Back numbers can always be obtained from your news dealer or the publishers.)

CHAPTER XXV.

TOD ON THE TRAIL.

After twenty years in the turmoil of New York, it seemed an irony of fate that Irving Hamilton Tod, the zealous but embryonic gumshoe man, should meet with an accident in that provincial center of culture, Boston.

Tod discovered, at the end of a fortnight, that to find a certain man among half a million of others was not as easy a matter as the writers of detective fiction would lead their readers to believe.

At the very beginning he decided upon a disguise. This marvelously original idea—it appealed to Tod that way, at least—had come to him like the proverbial bolt from the blue, and he seized upon it as a hungry man might pounce upon a delectable and defenseless sandwich.

"A disguise," he reasoned aloud to himself that first night, "is not only an aid, but an absolute necessity as well. In the first place, this man Klein, being a criminal, will associate with fellows of his type. To locate him I must become familiar with the haunts of the criminal classes. Therefore, I must allow my beard to grow and secure some old clothes. I must dress in keeping with the environment."

Having thus satisfied himself that his plans were feasible and quite in keeping with the usual method of running to earth the elusive breaker of laws, Tod proceeded with needless delay to put them into execution.

He moved to a third-class lodging house in a dismal part of the city, and secured an outfit which he hoped would serve to introduce him as one of the "submerged tenth."

Shoes, shirt, hat, and suit were carefully examined and as carefully donned. The suit was not as disreputable as he had planned to wear, but, after all, he convinced himself, some bad men did dress with a little care. The coat and trousers had been torn in several places and clumsily patched, the waistcoat was split up the back, while the trousers were sprinkled with grease spots.

Tod deliberated for a long time as to whether a false beard would improve his appearance or not, finally deciding it would be better for him to forego shaving for a few days. His natural beard was heavy, and a week's growth would contribute not a little to his make-up.

For two weeks Tod tramped the streets, and for two weeks his ambition remained at blood heat. The novelty of the affair appealed to him, and the different characters he met proved to be interesting. He shambled into disreputable saloons, and hobnobbed with the usual riffraff at the sloppy bars. He smoked vile tobacco—an unusual touch of realism, he told himself—and made an enemy of his stomach over the free lunch he was forced to devour and the liquid he washed it down with. He participated in several brawls, and discovered, much to his surprise, that a pair of lively fists were about the best friends a man can have.

All in all, this association—although he never sus-

pected it at the time—served to broaden his view of life and better his understanding of human nature.

However, when the third week of his quest dawned, and his mission was as yet unfulfilled, and the prospects far from brightening, Tod's adventures began to lose their glamour. He had long since resigned himself to an existence without his faithful valet, although that did not mean he had forgotten.

What, he wondered, would the valet do if he but knew where his master was at present existing; if he could behold the six-by-eight room, the rickety bed, the apology for linen, and the lusks of men who tramped the cold halls and sat in the hard chairs in the lobby?

Since the day he left New York Tod had not communicated with a single one of its inhabitants—that is, with the exception of a telegram to Reed, the city editor. Tod had decided it should be this way, so not a word reached Henri's alert ears, nor the ears of one far nearer and nearer—Claire Reed.

He often wondered what she thought of him now, and how she viewed his abrupt disappearance. Yet every time he paused to reflect his mind raced back to that uncomfortable half hour spent in his city editor's office. It was like shaking a red flag in front of a bull. It was the spur that urged him on day after day.

"I'll show Reed!" he would exclaim, gritting his teeth. "I'll show him! He's had enough fun at my expense. I'll get back at him if it's the last thing I do on this earth."

One rainy night Tod ventured into a new portion of the city, and in doing so gained his first real thrill. He had ducked into a café mainly to escape the steady drizzle, and was nodding absently over a glass of beer, when the conversation of two strangers at an adjoining table caught and held his ear.

He kept his eyes closed and feigned a low snore at regular intervals.

"If Doc was hangin' around New York," one of the men was saying, "I'd call it his job. That's how I got it sized up."

"Doc's in Frisco, ain't he?" inquired the second man.

"That's the dope, yes," returned the first. "But there ain't never no tellin'. Doc's in where the goin's good. I know. I been with him more 'an once, I have."

A door slammed. The conversation stopped. Evidently more drinks were ordered. Tod did not dare to look. Presently one of the men resumed:

"Don't you recollect that Los Angeles job? It was a bird."

The voice was lowered, and Tod could catch but a word now and then. A tantalizing laugh followed; then the sound of a glass being set down heavily on the marble-topped table.

"That was Doc for you," some one said. "Pulled the fawy right off the train, he did. Flashed a phony badge and made 'em think he was a shadow. An' he got away with it, too." Another laugh. "That's one o' Doc's tricks I always says how——"

Once more the voice died away, and only a confused mumble reached Tod's ears. But he had overheard quite enough for the moment. The mention of the unknown "Doc" and his trick of flashing a fake badge stirred a flood of memories in his fertile mind. The remembrance of that detective on board the Fall River boat, and the unexpected turn of affairs after he had taken Klein ashore sprang vividly to the colt reporter's brain.

What object had this detective in arresting Klein, the suspect in the Delmar case, and afterward setting him free? The Newport warden had never heard of this sleuth, Jarge. Yet this same Jarge seemed well acquainted with the Delmar case and all of the details surrounding it. In fact, he knew as much concerning it as Tod himself.

Narrowing it all down, it was plain that the detective had taken Klein off the boat to prevent Tod from having him arrested. This much seemed certain.

While all of this was racing through Tod's brain the two strangers finished with their beer and were starting for the door. The moment the door closed behind them Tod jerked himself erect. Being inexperienced and beside himself with excitement, he did not realize what an indiscreet move it was.

One of the two men, glancing back through the misted window, beheld the supposed sleeper now on his feet. Quick to suspect, he informed his partner:

"That guy is actin' queer! He ain't been sleepin'! I guess I ought to——"

Irving Tod opened the door and emerged into the drizzle of the night. He stood undecided for a moment, peering up and down the unfamiliar street. Then, turning up his coat collar and giving a final tug to his cap, he swung briskly around the corner.

He whirled as a step sounded behind him—but he was just a second too late.

An iron fist crashed against his chin, and instantly he beheld a glorious constellation; saw Mars, Jupiter, and Venus, and counted the eight moons around Saturn. After that he sprawled limply on the wet cobblestones.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RESULT OF A RESCUE.

The mysterious robbery at the Lydeckers' puzzled Klein for some time after he had reached his boarding house. The room in which the affair occurred had been gone over inch by inch without a bit of evidence as a reward. After that every man had submitted to search—eagerly and voluntarily. Still no clew. Not one of the men had passed out of the room between the time the brooch was seen on Miss Lydecker's bodice and the moment she found it to be missing. This, of course, added not a little to the mystery surrounding the jewel.

Very carefully and methodically Klein went back over the affair, piecing together conversation and action. He recalled the movements of each of the men, and of the hostess as she tripped here and there, attending to the wants of her guests. And one trivial incident, which at first appeared to be of little value, loomed up so suggestively that it caused Klein to lose the remainder of the night's sleep.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed to himself. "That's a most promising clew!"

Daylight was streaming through the windows of his room when he finally arranged matters to his liking. After that he must have dozed. The landlady aroused him at noon.

That night at the dress rehearsal the weight of conversation was on the Lydecker robbery, and a dozen theories were advanced by as many of the cast. Klein

ventured none, and listened in an apparently indifferent way to the talk about him.

At the end of the performance, Bond, the director, called him to one side.

"I don't exactly like that costume, Klein," he said. "I had meant to see you before. It isn't quite how I wanted the character dressed."

"It is the best I can do, Mr. Bond," said Klein. "I haven't a thing in my own wardrobe, and I've been to half a dozen shops here in Hudson."

"Suppose you try Fall River?"

"When can I get away?"

"I'll excuse you to-morrow morning," the director answered. "I'll also give you an address of a costumer."

The trip between Hudson and Fall River could be made in less than an hour by the trolley line, so, not being obliged to report at the theater, Klein set out the next morning for the latter city. This was his first trip out of Hudson since his arrival there a month previous, and the opportunity, unexpectedly given him, was enjoyed. The country through which the car passed was a beautiful one, and the views from the window engrossed Klein's attention until the outskirts of Fall River were reached.

Here and there, standing in groups about the big mills, Klein observed crowds of men and women. At intervals the car passed militiamen who appeared to be on guard at the gates and along the roads. This instantly recalled to Klein's mind the trouble existing between the mill owners and the workers; the serious friction that threatened the textile industry of the world. Fall River and the surrounding districts were the hotbeds of disturbance.

The conductor of the car, noticing Klein's apparent interest, spoke to him.

"Them workers are a bad lot," he observed, shaking his head; "and there's goin' to be somethin' doin' when they get mixed up with them soldiers. Just you wait!"

"How long have the militia been here?" asked Klein.

"Goin' on a week now. And it gets the strikers all excited, too. Why, it was only yesterday mornin' they smashed one of our cars and beat up a fellow they took to be a spotter."

"How long has the strike been on?"

"The best part of two months," the conductor answered.

Once in the city, Klein left the car at the loop, and hunted out the costumer whose address Bond had given him. He found the place without difficulty, and purchased some articles for the necessary wardrobe. With his packages securely wrapped and tucked under his arm, he retraced his steps.

While he was standing on a corner, waiting for a car that was already overdue, Klein caught sight of two men, apparently strikers, chasing a third. Cries of "Spotter! Spotter! Stop him!" rang out.

Suddenly the fleeing man stumbled and fell, and the pursuers, with a triumphant shout, were on the point of reaching him when Klein, getting a glimpse of his face, stifled an exclamation and leaped forward.

The man, who was struggling to rise, was the colt reporter whom Klein had outwitted that day in New York, and whom he had last seen standing on the Newport pier.

Klein, without stopping to think of consequences, struck one of the pursuers, and his companion, alarmed, turned and ran. Then, fearful that others might be attracted to the spot, Klein helped the reporter to his feet, and dragged him quickly to the corner, just as a Hudson car approached.

"Never mind the explanations," he exclaimed. "And don't argue. Up you go! Grab that handle! There!"

He had the other inside almost before the car had come to a standstill. When they had started, Klein breathed more freely.

Tod, still breathless, and greatly excited, turned and said: "That was pretty quick work, wasn't it? I—I guess it's my cue to thank you."

"Don't do it. I'm glad I happened along when I did. Things were looking rather bad, weren't they?"

Klein's mind was racing. At the moment he had recognized the colt reporter, he had beheld one other thing that riveted his attention. And while he could not stand idly by and see the reporter beaten by a pair of enraged strikers, still, the startling discovery he had made prompted him to use more forceful measures than were really necessary. It looked as though, at this unexpected juncture, a new light was to be thrown upon the confusing Delmar mystery.

Meanwhile, Irving Tod was squirming about in his seat, and his actions betrayed his embarrassment. Finally, as if realizing the necessity of some explanation, he turned and blurted out:

"I say, you—you haven't forgotten me, have you?"

"Forgotten you?" Klein smiled at the question.

"Yes. You—you know who I am, don't you? You've recognized me, haven't you? You knew this when—when you mixed in a fight just now and—and saved me from a beating?"

"Yes," said Klein, "I recognized you."

The reporter was puzzled. "You knew I was after you, and instead of running away you—you——" He hesitated and bit his lips, as if he knew what he wanted to say, but could not express himself.

Klein laughed. The car was filling rapidly. A dozen questions were pounding at his brain, but he decided to wait for a more opportune moment before asking them. A crowded car was no place for explanations.

The reporter, however, did not seem to hold this view of the matter.

"You're a brick, Mr. Klein!" he exclaimed. "I might have been killed if you—— My name's Tod. You know my business. I've been hunting you for a month. A deuce of a lot depends upon my getting hold of you and taking you back to New York. Twice I thought I had you, and twice I've been stung. And now that I've found you again, I don't want you."

"Why not?" asked Klein curiously.

"Because if you were guilty of that Delmar murder you wouldn't have saved me from those strikers; it isn't human nature. A man isn't going to set a trap and then walk into it."

"What gave you the impression that I was guilty?"

"You as much as confessed to me that day in the Albany Hotel. Then that taxicab game you pulled on me later—it all went to show——"

"Didn't I say, that day in the hotel, that I would tell you a story?"

"You did."

"Well, I'm going to keep my word."

"You really mean it?" Tod's eyes opened wide. "You really mean that you will—will——"

"I said a story, Mr. Tod," Klein interrupted. "There is a great deal of difference between a story and a confession. That is where you were wrong the first time. I said I would tell you a story, and you immediately jumped to the conclusion that it was to be a confession."

"I guess you are right," the reporter admitted after a moment of meditation.

"There's an old saying that two heads are better than one," Klein remarked slowly, "and I guess the same can be said of two stories."

"What do you mean?" questioned the frowning Tod.

"Just wait and see."

CHAPTER XXVII.

TWO AND TWO MAKE FOUR.

It was just noon when Klein, accompanied by the puzzled colt reporter, stepped off the trolley car at Hudson. As they passed the theater, on Purchase Street, Tod suddenly touched the other's arm.

"Who is that man across the street?" he asked.

Klein looked at the man in question, and then back into Tod's perplexed eyes.

"He's a member of the Hudson Stock Company," he answered.

"I've seen him somewhere before."

"In New York?"

"Yes, I'm sure it was in New York. I'll remember presently," Tod said as they walked on.

At last they came to Klein's boarding house. Once they were in the room, Klein turned and faced the reporter.

"Where did you get that suit?" he demanded abruptly.

"I—I got it in Fall River," answered Tod, taken aback at the unusual question.

"Where in Fall River?"

"In a hockshop."

"Good Lord!"

"What's the trouble?" The colt, for all his denseness, was quick to scent trouble. "What's wrong with my suit?"

"There is nothing wrong with it," Klein announced slowly, thoughtfully. "Only a month or so ago I was wearing it."

"You were wearing it?" echoed Tod.

Klein nodded. "I happened to be wearing it on the night of the Delmar murder. And when I last saw Delmar, he was wearing it."

"I say now!" exclaimed the reporter, apparently undecided whether to frown or smile. "What's the joke? Or isn't it one?"

Klein proceeded to explain. He told of the visit to Delmar's room, the changes of clothes, and his friend's disappearance by the way of the fire escape.

"But Delmar was found in a gray suit," Tod interrupted. "I was there. I saw him."

"So we all know; but Delmar had on this brown suit when he left his room. And some one wearing this brown suit was seen entering the elevator at the Albany Hotel."

Klein went on to clear up a few other points the reporter seemed puzzled over.

"And now," he said at last, "you've got my story. And you will also understand why, at the moment of meeting you, I could not risk being taken in hand by the police."

"By George!" exclaimed Tod. "That is some story! But I don't quite see how——"

"I don't, either." Klein took the sentence from the other's lips. "That is why I brought you here. I want your story."

After several interruptions and not a little coaching—for Tod was inclined to overlook some of the important features—Klein learned of the reporter's adventures, beginning with the moment Klein and the detective had left him on the deserted pier at Newport.

"What brought you to Fall River?" Klein asked.

"The conversation I overheard in the saloon. I got to thinking this detective, Jarge, might be the man they called Doc. The cabby said he'd gone to Fall River. The trick he turned with you naturally made me suspicious. I thought if I could locate him I'd soon determine whether he was a real sleuth or not."

"And what kind of game did I interrupt this morning?"

The reporter grinned. "Well, I arrived in Fall River yesterday, and started out on a still hunt for my detective. I imagined this town was a likely place for him on account of the trouble with the textile strikers. I don't know whatever possessed me, but I came across my fire badge, and pinned it on my waistcoat. Then the trouble began. Somebody spotted it, and the next moment I was chasing down the street. They thought I was a sleuth of some kind."

"That accounts for everything except the suit," Klein said.

"Oh, the clothes I left Boston in were a little too good to serve for a practical disguise," Tod went on to explain, "and when I stepped off the train at Fall River I saw a hockshop directly across the street. So I went in and got this suit, to make me look a little more like one of the town workingmen."

"Do you suppose we could trace anything through the——"

"Trace anything?" Tod broke in. "From that pawnbroker? Never in a thousand years. Half the stuff he has is stolen goods, and if we started into ask questions he'd be suspicious and close up like a clam."

"Correct," answered Klein, pleased at the other's deductions. He studied over the problem for a time.

"I don't suppose there is anything in the pockets that might give us a clew?"

"Hardly." Tod laughed. "I'd like to see anything escape that pawnbroker."

Despite his certainty, Tod went through all the pockets, turning them wrong side out. From an inside pocket of the coat, as he pulled out the lining, a folded bit of paper dropped to the floor.

With an exclamation Tod seized it. "By George! Here is something." He smoothed the wrinkles, and turned the paper over and over in his fingers.

"Rot!" He tossed the paper disgustedly to the table. "I thought we'd found something. It's nothing but a torn piece of newspaper. Now, if this had been in a story, we would have unexpectedly come across a handkerchief with certain initials on it—and the rest would have been easy."

Klein took the torn paper, and examined it critically. Then, without a word, he placed it in his pocket.

"What are you doing that for?" asked the surprised Tod. "It can't lead to anything. Maybe the pawnbroker put it there. You don't suppose it's a clew, do you?"

"You never can tell," Klein answered slowly, calmly.

"It is the little things that count. Anyway, there won't be any harm in keeping it."

Ten minutes later, when Klein was preparing to leave for the theater—for reasons of his own he had cautioned Tod not to leave the house—the reporter broke into a sudden shout.

"By George!" he cried, thumping the table. "I knew I'd get it! I knew it!"

Klein turned a pair of questioning eyes upon him.

"What's the excitement?"

"Remember the fellow we saw an hour or so ago across from the theater? Recollect my asking who he was?"

"Yes."

"Well, it just came to me. I was positive I had seen him before. I saw that man at Mrs. Wold's boarding house!"

"At Mrs. Wold's?" echoed Klein. Only the slight flicker of an eyelash betrayed the fact that he was surprised at the unexpected announcement. "When did you see him there?"

"Let me see." Tod reflected a minute. "Why, it was just after the police were called. I went there with our star man, Reese. I saw this man in the hall, and later Mrs. Wold spoke to him. She told me he was a roomer."

"How was he dressed?"

"I can't recall now. The lights were low."

When Klein left for the matinée performance, he stopped in at the telegraph office, and sent a wire to Mrs. Wold, signing Tod's name. And after the matinée he called at the same office, and was handed an answer. He read it through, smiled grimly, placed it in his pocket, and hurried to rejoin the reporter.

The slim clew he had worked upon was swiftly emerging from a possibility into a grim reality. There now remained but one or two gaps to span, and Klein felt confident that these would shortly be mastered.

In fact, the complexity of the Delmar case was beginning to assume such astounding proportions that on the very brink of a solution Klein was amazed. To all outward appearance the assault upon Delmar, on the roof of the boarding house in New York, was a mere prelude to the drama that was now being enacted.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SOME PREPARATIONS.

A council of war was held in Klein's room, and Klein, as the general, sketched out his plans carefully and critically. A greater part of it was mystifying to the reporter, and he interrupted at frequent intervals.

Mention was made of the robbery at the Lydecker home.

"The Lydeckers?" exclaimed Tod. "Why, I'm acquainted with them. I was at their home a fortnight last summer."

"Good!" Klein said approvingly. "That will help matters."

"What do you mean? Are they in on this?" Tod inquired.

"I intend to stage this drama in their home on Saturday night," Klein announced. "And it will be a great production, Tod. The cast is complete—hero, heroine, loving father, suspicious stranger, and the crafty villain, not forgetting the brilliant crowd of supernumeraries. The curtain will ring up promptly, and if I'm not mistaken it will ring down upon the most stirring climax Hudson has ever witnessed."

"What rôle am I cast for?" Tod asked.

"You're to play yourself: a clever newspaper man who pulls off the greatest scoop of the year."

The reporter looked doubtful. "Are you kidding me?"

"Not at all. I'm serious."

"Do you think I can get away with it?" Tod grinned sheepishly. "You know I've been cast for such parts before, and haven't made good."

"You've got to get away with this," Klein declared.

"Do I have a chance at the villain?"

"According to my 'script' you will be right in at the finish. You share the honors of the play with the hero."

"Meaning yourself, I suppose," Tod said.

"That isn't for me to say," Klein replied, laughing with the other. "It all depends upon the audience."

"Under those conditions, then, I'll sign contracts," returned Tod. "No rehearsals—and no pay?"

"None."

After dinner Tod ventured to comment upon the actions of the detective, Jarge, on the Fall River steamer.

"I read a message he was sending to the Newport police," the reporter said. "He came into the wireless room while I was sending a few lines to my city editor."

"What did he say when you spoke to him about arresting me?"

"He said that was his intention. He promised to let me in on the whole story before the other newspaper men got it. That's what took me to the jail at seven that morning. When I arrived there I found no one had ever heard of him. Now, what object could he have had in taking you ashore at Newport?"

"It looks as though he wanted to outwit you," Klein answered.

"But why?"

"Well, that's to be found out later. I have a suspicion of the truth. We'll know on Saturday night."

"But why are you keeping all the plot to yourself?" protested Tod.

"Because you'll give a better performance when the time comes," Klein told him.

"I don't see how you get that! It seems to me the more I know about the thing, the better——"

"You've never been an actor, have you, Tod?" Klein interrupted.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Well, the first thing an actor learns is that the stage director's word is final. He is the high lord of decision. On the seamy side of the curtain he is supreme. If he tells you that black is white, it *is* white. Now, I am the director in the present little drama which will have its première performance on Saturday night, so please don't dispute my orders."

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHAT'S THE JOKE?

On Friday afternoon Klein met Miss Lydecker. She had attended the matinée, and Klein had noticed her in a box with Miss Reed. The latter, however, was not in the lobby when he hurried around after the performance, in response to a note from Miss Lydecker.

The shock of the robbery, now a week old, had not made much impression upon the girl, probably because she did not realize the money value of her brooch. Her greatest concern seemed to be for her father.

"Daddy has taken the robbery so to heart," she told Klein, after the first meeting. "I think he has engaged detectives on the case, and intends to have them at our dance to-morrow night. Of course, the guests are not to know. And I only hope they do not find it out; it would be so embarrassing. Everybody would naturally think they were under suspicion. You don't believe, as daddy does, do you, Mr. Klein, that one of our guests really took my brooch?"

"I would rather not express an opinion now. However, the jewel is missing, and there were no outsiders present. I think your father did the proper thing in engaging detectives."

"But you spoke so encouragingly to me that night" Miss Lydecker said. "And I felt as if you would be instrumental in recovering the brooch."

"A week is a very short time in which to collect all the evidence needed to trace——"

"Oh," she interrupted, her eyes shining; "then you are trying to help us?"

"In my own small way, yes." Klein answered modestly.

Klein escorted the girl out to the curb, and helped her into the waiting auto. Suddenly she touched his arm.

"It just came to me, Mr. Klein," she said impulsively, "that, after all, it wasn't a ghost I saw that night while you and I were on the porch. Do you recollect my exclamation, and how you jumped down and searched along the hedge?"

"Perfectly," Klein answered, "but I didn't find anybody, did I?"

"No; but maybe——" began Miss Lydecker.

Klein shook his head. "By the way," he said, abruptly changing the conversation, "have I your permission to bring a friend with me to-morrow night?"

"Why, certainly," the girl responded. "The more the merrier. Does your friend happen to be an actor?"

"Worse than that," Klein told her, laughing. "He's a newspaper man. And I believe you are acquainted with him."

"Really? Who is he?"

"Mr. Irving Tod, of New York."

"Irving Tod!" cried Miss Lydecker. Then, while Klein looked on in amazement, the girl leaned back in the car and laughed until the tears came. "Irving Tod? Just fancy that!" she exclaimed, after her first outburst. "And he is a friend of yours? And in Hudson?"

"I haven't known him so very long," Klein admitted dubiously. "And, of course, if there is anything about him that——"

"Oh, no!" the girl hurriedly interrupted. "It isn't that. Only—only his being in Hudson seems to bring matters ——" She hesitated.

"I don't understand," Klein said.

"Of course you don't." Miss Lydecker broke into another peal of laughter. "And what is more, you won't know until to-morrow night. But by all means bring him."

She nodded to the chauffeur, and waved a hand to Klein as the car swung away from the curb.

"Good-by!" she called back. "And don't you dare forget! The fun will begin at midnight."

Klein watched until the car had disappeared around the first corner. Then he walked thoughtfully toward his boarding house.

"Yes," he said aloud to himself, repeating Miss Lydecker's final sentence, "the fun will begin at midnight."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE OVERTURE.

At dinner that night, Klein purposely avoided mentioning his talk with Miss Lydecker. Should Tod hear of it, the fact might prove a damper on Klein's carefully laid plans. The reporter might even refuse to appear.

Early Saturday morning, on his way to rehearsal, Klein paid a visit to the local offices of the Fall River Steamship Line. What he learned there, after a short interview with the man in charge, only served to strengthen his first suspicions, and partly to substantiate the theory advanced by Tod. After several false starts and disappointments, thanks to Klein's tireless determination, the whole complicated mechanism of the case appeared to be running in well-oiled grooves.

The same big automobiles met the invited members of the stock company at the stage door that night after the performance, and whirled them through the quiet city streets to the Lydecker home overlooking the sea. The great house was ablaze with lights, and upon entering, Klein found that most of the guests had arrived.

Miss Lydecker anxiously inquired for his friend Tod.

"Mr. Tod will be here very shortly," said Klein. "He was unavoidably detained."

Klein had, previous to this, instructed the reporter not to appear until after the arrival of the automobiles from the theater.

So it was exactly midnight when Tod made his entrance upon the scene, and was met by Klein and Miss Lydecker.

"What a surprise this is," Miss Lydecker said. "It has been almost a year since you were last here. And now that you have honored me with your presence, I'll make the surprise a mutual one. Just wait!" And with a laugh the hostess darted away.

"What's the plot?" asked Tod, turning to Klein.

"Ask me something easy," Klein answered. "I'm as much in the dark as you are."

Then he told the reporter what had taken place the day before, after the matinée, and how Miss Lydecker had acted when Tod's name was mentioned.

The reporter looked uneasy. "I say now," he burst out, "if this is some joke——"

"It can't be a very serious one," Klein interrupted.

"I know; but I hate to be made a goat of. I think I'll go back to the boarding house." He started away, only to have Klein reach out and pull him back.

"If you leave this house, it will be over my dead body!" exclaimed Klein, with pretended seriousness. "You'll have to grin and bear it like a hero."

"First I was a reporter, then a detective, and now you want me to be a hero," groaned Tod. "I've made a horrible fizzle of the first two."

"You'll have to make a dazzling success of the last one," Klein told him. "And remember, you're under contract with me. Our little drama hasn't started yet."

"I feel as if something's going to start," Tod replied, shifting uneasily from foot to foot. "You know, Klein, I was never meant to——"

He stopped suddenly, as if a hand had been clapped to

his mouth. His blue eyes widened like saucers. There, in the doorway beside Miss Lydecker, stood Miss Reed!

"Irving Tod!" Miss Reed broke the silence, advancing toward him.

"Claire Reed!" echoed Tod, starting toward her.

At this critical stage of affairs, Miss Reed's intentions seemed to waver. A change came over her. She stopped, and threw back her head.

"Please don't speak to me, Mr. Tod!" she exclaimed, her eyes flashing.

"Why, Claire——"

"Don't, I say!" Miss Reed's voice rang out as coldly as an echo against an iceberg.

"But, Claire!" protested the astonished Tod. "What have I done? I wrote you—in New York—that I was going away, and——"

"There is no need of your explaining," she said. "My father has told me all. You deceived me." Her voice wavered. "You pretended you were going away on business. Instead of that you have been—been——" She choked dangerously near to tears.

"Claire!" protested the reporter. "Just let me explain."

"Stop! I don't want to hear any more falsehoods." Very dramatically she lifted her hands, and clasped them. "I have fought it all out with myself." She looked over at the amused Klein. "Mr. Klein is going to help me get a position on the stage. I shall devote my life to my art."

"Nonsense!" cried Tod, gazing from Klein back to the girl again. "You—you don't want to go on the stage! And I haven't lied to you, Claire. I've been working hard all this time in order to prove——"

"My father——" began Miss Reed.

"Confound your father!" snapped the reporter. "You know he never did like me. He always tries to——"

"The stage is calling me," Miss Reed said softly, as if she had heard nothing of Tod's outburst. "I shall sacrifice all life's pleasures upon the altar of art."

The first strains of a waltz came drifting in from the ballroom. Taking advantage of it, Miss Reed dramatically swept across the floor, flung aside the heavy curtains, and with one last look at the agonized reporter, made a most effective and striking exit.

The hostess, as surprised as the others at the unexpected turn of affairs, broke into profuse apologies.

"I had no idea the thing would end this way!" she exclaimed. "Claire came here a fortnight ago, and said she had had a quarrel with Mr. Tod. I thought of course it was all a foolish whim that would pass away in a week or so. And when Mr. Klein said Mr. Tod was in town, I congratulated myself that at last things were to be settled amicably. And now——"

"And now," Klein interrupted, "Tod has the opportunity to show us he is made of the stuff of heroes."

"Who wants to be a hero—now?" groaned the reporter.

"You do, Tod," Klein returned. "Miss Reed thinks you are unworthy. You've got to prove to her that you are not. Why, things could not have happened at a more opportune moment. Make yourself a hero to-night, Tod, and Miss Reed will forget her ambitions and her art."

The reporter began to absorb a little of the other's enthusiasm. "Do you really think so?" he asked.

"Think so?" replied Klein, following up his first thrust. "Why, it can't be otherwise. Buck up, old man! Show them all that you've backbone! Don't go under at the first clang of the gong! This night will mean a lot for you."

Miss Lydecker had slipped away, apparently to join the other girl. That her intended surprise had ended so abruptly and so disastrously weighed heavily upon her.

For some time Tod remained in a dubious frame of mind, listening to Klein's arguments.

"Maybe you're right, Klein," he announced wearily. "I'm in the last ditch, and I'd better fight it out than surrender."

"That's the most sensible remark I've heard you make. It sounds like a man, Tod! Now, put on a smile, and prepare yourself for an effective entrance upon the scene. Miss Lydecker will introduce you. And remember, once we pass through that door we are strangers to each other! Are you ready?"

"All ready!" The fire of adventure sprang into the colt reporter's eyes. He threw back his shoulders.

"Pick up your cues," Klein warned him. "And remember everything I've told you. Everything depends upon our working together."

"Trust me!"

"There goes the orchestra. It's *our* overture. Got your 'side props?"

Tod felt in his hip pocket. "All O. K.," he murmured.

"All ready, then! Our curtain is going up. Good luck!"

Tod stepped through the doorway and disappeared.

TO BE CONTINUED.

A MYSTERIOUS CRIME.

By GEORGE ARNOLD.

It was a cold, still night in autumn, and the country residence of Squire Covern lay dark and silent, with its many gables, towers, and wings unlit by the yet unrisen moon.

The squire had had his supper early, read the evening papers just brought from the city by the last train, played a couple of games of chess with his daughter, and, after drinking his customary glass of hot brandy and sugar, had gone to bed.

The night waned with its load of crime and horror. The squire's daughter and the servants, who were the only occupants of the house besides himself, slept well. It seemed that the head of the household was unusually somnolent, too, for the maid knocked three times at his door in the morning, without receiving an answer. The manservant then tried it, but with no better results.

Mary Covern grew fearful that her father was ill—he had been troubled with heart disease, and might have died in the night, even—and so she ordered the door to be opened by force. It was locked on the inside, but a few heavy blows broke the fastening and the chamber was entered.

The old gentleman was dead. He lay upon the bed, covered with blood, cold and stark, in a strained position, with a long-bladed, two-edged dagger driven nearly to the hilt in the region of the heart. The handle was loosely clasped by the fingers of the right hand, as if death had relaxed their grip, and those who were present exclaimed, with one voice, one word:

"Suicide!"

Mary Covern was to have been married in a few weeks to a neighbor's son—a young lawyer. In this hour of overwhelming sorrow she sent for her lover at once.

The young man came instantly and found the whole house in the wildest confusion. He learned the news from Mary, who told him, half in sobs and half in broken words; and, after offering her such temporary comfort as he could, ascended to the chamber of death.

He examined the position of everything with a scrutinizing eye, and especially that of the body.

After a long time spent in the investigation, he passed about the room once more, and lastly looked well to the door and its lock. It had been locked on the inside, and the key left in its place. The young man removed the key, put it in his pocket, and proceeded to search for letters or papers that might indicate the cause of the suicide. None such were found anywhere.

That evening I received a note from him as follows:

"TUESDAY.

"FRIEND G.: Squire Covern has died very suddenly, and I want somebody to confer with about it. There is a mystery to unravel, and I will be greatly indebted to you if you can spare a few days to help me. Come to-morrow morning, and make your home with me as long as you like. As ever, yours, ASHBY."

I had often visited the Ashbys at their pleasant home in the suburbs, and, of course, knew Mary Covern and her father tolerably well. Having nothing especial to do just then, I was glad to assist young Ashby, who had been a good friend to me in many ways.

Accordingly, I took an early train, and in two hours was in close conference with the young man.

"What earthly motive could there have been for the suicide?" I asked, when I had learned the circumstances.

"None, except sudden insanity, to which Mr. Covern was by no means predisposed."

"He left no papers to show the cause?"

"No. I don't think he knew it himself."

"Why should he do it, then?"

"I don't think he did it!"

"What? What do you mean?"

"He was murdered!"

"No!"

"I think so."

This announcement filled me with a new horror.

"Can you imagine by whom?"

"Not yet."

"Does Miss Mary agree with you?"

"She knows nothing of my supposition. It is unnecessary to shock her any further, until we have something definite to communicate to her."

"What do you base your belief on?"

"Well, in the first place, a want of motive for self-destruction; next, the position of the right hand holding the dagger. See here," said he, taking up a paper knife that lay on the table: "if I were going to stab myself, I would naturally hold the weapon with my thumb on top of the handle, and my little finger toward the hilt, thus. Now, in Mr. Covern's case, the dagger was held with the thumb toward the hilt, just as one would hold a table knife. A hard blow could not be struck in that manner; and the blow must have been forcible, for it penetrated very deep. Depend upon it, George, there was another hand had hold of that dagger when the stab was given."

"It does seem so, indeed."

"Yes; and then again, the agony of death would have been likely to tighten the grasp, while I observed that the fingers were very slightly bent round the handle of the knife, as if they had been placed there after they had begun to stiffen."

"But the door was locked, you told me."

"Yes; and the key was on the inside. Here it is. It is long, you see, and went clear through the lock; so that this end protruded on the outside. See here, on the end—don't that look like the mark of a strong pair of pincers?"

"It does."

"That was how the door was unlocked and locked again. It works very easily, I find; and I myself locked it and unlocked it with a small pair of tweezers, to try it."

"You are curiously acute—but then, so was the assassin, whoever he is."

"Yes, he has done it cunningly; but I have a feeling that I shall mark him soon."

"Have you any further evidence?"

"Yes; the room has been robbed, as near as I can judge. The squire's account books, which I examined privately yesterday, show that he drew twenty-five hundred dollars from the bank the day before yesterday, when he was in the city. He was going to purchase another horse and carriage, I believe; but he did not do so that day, and I cannot find the money anywhere."

"Now, we want to find out who knew he had this money in the house."

"And that will not be so easy."

"Who slept in the house?"

"Mary, the three women servants, cook, housemaid, and chambermaid, and the man Thomas."

"What is he?"

"A quiet, smart sort of fellow. He is coachman, groom, and general manservant."

I hated to ask if it were possible that he might have done the cruel deed, but Ashby saw the question in my face and answered it without my having asked it in words.

"I should hardly suspect him, though I shall certainly keep an eye upon him."

A coroner's inquest was held, and the jury decided that the deceased came to his death by a stab from a dagger in his own hands. Ashby might have changed this verdict, perhaps, by telling his suspicions and their grounds, but he chose to learn more without letting the murderer know that anybody imagined the death to have been other than a suicide.

Both he and I kept a strict lookout upon the neighbors, and, in a short time discovered that a worthless, drunken fellow—a tavern hanger-on, who had been caught in several small delinquencies—was tolerably flush of money. We kept a careful watch over all his movements; and, after a week of detective service, found that he had stolen a quantity of copper sheathing from a shipyard and sold it in the city. We had been upon a false scent.

In the meantime, however, we had not neglected matters nearer home. Ashby had been all over the murdered man's house stealthily, and examined every room in it, unknown to any one save myself; and we had consulted

together on every circumstance, no matter how trifling, that might give us the faintest clew to the mystery.

A will had been found among the squire's papers, leaving his whole property to his only child, Mary, and other papers and accounts proved conclusively that he had been cut off in the midst of many projects and plans, without a moment's forethought or warning. The idea of suicide became palpably absurd to us who knew all these facts.

"How is it?" I asked Ashby, during one of our secret sessions, "that there was no struggle or outcry? Why did Mr. Covern lie down with his clothes on? He must have been stabbed where he lay—from the looks of the bed. There was no blood anywhere else."

"It might have been done with chloroform; but I don't see why he should have been lying down dressed, at his usual bedtime, nor can I find any trace of chloroform about the house."

"By Jove! I just remember something! Have an idea!"

"What is it?"

"There was a goblet on the parlor mantel with the remains of some brandy and sugar in it, when I first arrived here, and I recollect smelling of it. It smelled like spirits, and like opium also. In the confusion of the event, the glass stood there, I suppose, for two or three days. Could not somebody have put laudanum in the old gentleman's evening drink? That might have made him too sleepy to undress, and he may have thrown himself on the bed, unable to keep his eyes open. The murderer could then have entered and done the crime, without a cry or a movement of his victim."

"That was it unquestionably; and now I have the whole story."

"What do you mean?" I asked, getting terribly nervous—as is my unfortunate habit when excited by any great expectation.

"Simply this: the morning after the murder I examined the faces of all those who came into the room, and noticed that Thomas, the servant, had cut himself while shaving—you know what a scrupulous, neat sort of a fellow he is—and had a little bit of paper stuck over the cut. My attention was called to it by its bright-blue color. Very good, so far. That afternoon, while looking about, I picked up a vial, with a blue label, in the back yard. It was marked 'Laudanum,' and I'll bet a thousand pounds that one corner of it is torn off. I'll go and get it."

The vial, being brought, was a small one, with a bright-blue label, which had peeled off around the edges, and one corner of it was gone.

"Thomas, then, had that bottle in his room that morning, and threw it out of the window, afterward, into the yard," said Ashby.

"Who mixed the brandy and sugar?"

"Mr. Covern always did it himself; but Thomas often brought up the goblet and sugar and hot water."

"Then Thomas is a murderer!"

"I fear it is so."

It was plain that we must resort to strategy to make the man confess. His plans had been so deftly laid, that even Ashby could not fix legal proofs upon him.

"If we could find out that he had an accomplice," said Ashby, "it would be plain sailing at once. All we would have to do would be to go to one with a story that the other had confessed, and the truth would, probably, come out. As it is, I don't know what we can do, except to wait."

"I wish to Heaven that ghost stories were true, and that Mr. Covern's spirit might inform us how to proceed."

"Good! I am obliged to you! You have given me an idea!"

"I am glad of it. What is it?"

"Never mind now. I'll let you know before I act upon it."

Ashby and I had taken a room in Mr. Covern's house, in obedience to Mary Covern's wish—for the poor girl was lonely now. She passed most of her time with the Ashbys, who lived within a stone's throw; but when her betrothed and I came back from the city at night, she returned home—and we spent many a pleasant evening together in the cozy, well-furnished parlor of her own house.

On the night after the above conversation, I sought our chamber alone, as Ashby had gone out, saying that he had an errand in the village, and would be back in an hour. I sat down before the fire in our room, and, lighting a cigar, began to sum up all the circumstances of the affair that had so deeply interested us of late. It was an exciting subject, and I grew nervous with thinking about it.

I found ere long that the striking of the clock downstairs made me start as if I had been struck myself.

It sounded twelve, and, as the last ring, muffled by walls and doors, met my ear, I heard a soft step outside, and a light, scarcely distinguishable tap at the door. I thought it must be Mary, and I hastened to see what she wanted.

There was no one at the door.

I regained my seat, blaming my too vivid imagination, but once more the rapping came, this time too distinct for fancy.

"Come in," said I, "if you are human."

The door slowly opened, and a tall, straight figure advanced, all in white, holding in its hand the dagger with which Mr. Covern had been stabbed.

I am tolerably courageous, as a general thing, and have too little faith of any sort to believe very firmly in ghosts, so I merely puffed out a mouthful of smoke, knocked the ash from my cigar, and, drawing a chair beside my own, motioned the supernatural visitor to a seat.

"How do you like my get-up?" asked the ghost, in the unmistakable voice of Ashby; "I didn't want to scare you to death, but only to see whether I couldn't scare Thomas to confession."

"Capital!" said I; "my dear fellow, you couldn't have hit on a better plan; and I assure you, you do look uncommonly spiritual in that rig."

"Come with me, then, in your stockinged feet; I want you for a witness. You must stay just outside the door while I go in and wake him up.

In two minutes' time Thomas was awakened by a cold, clammy hand—moistened with ice water for the purpose—passed over his face. He raised himself up in bed, and found his bed lamp lit and the ghost standing by his side, with one pale hand outstretched, holding the fatal dagger over his heart.

Standing just at the crack of the door, I could see the whole scene distinctly.

Thomas was, at first, paralyzed. He was seized with a fit of trembling, and made strange, gurgling noises in his throat, as if the organs of speech refused their office. Then, as Ashby majestically glided to the other side of the room, and waved his hand as if to ask the poor wretch to follow him, he crept, shuddering, from the bed, and, kneeling down upon the floor, prayed, with clasped hands, for mercy and forgiveness.

Ashby bade him, in hollow tones, to confess in prayer and to beg forgiveness above, for on earth he would find only his deserved punishment. It was a dangerous experiment for him to speak aloud, for many persons would have recognized his voice, disguised as it was; but Thomas was too thoroughly frightened for this; and, as Ashby had desired, he mingled prayer and confession together, and told the whole dark story.

He told how he had been ordered to go after the new horse and carriage, and how Mr. Covern had mentioned his having the money with him; how temptation crept into his mind at that moment, and he listened to it; how he laid all his plans that day, and resolved to make the death appear like self-murder; how he sharpened the dagger on his razor strop, preferring to use the weapon, because no one knew he had it; how he mingled laudanum with the sugar of his master's evening drink; how he stole to the chamber barefooted after all had retired, turned the key with a pair of pincers from the outside, entered, and found his victim lying dressed upon the bed, in a heavy stupor; how he gave the fearful blow—only one and quickly—but with force and precision; how he secured the money, which he had to search for several minutes, but found at last in a secretary drawer; how he returned, locking the door as he had unlocked it, and, seeking his room, concealed the gold in a large, wide-mouthed jar of liquid blacking, where it still remained; how he meant to keep quiet for a few months, and then to leave the country on some plausible pretext, enter business, be honest, and become, he had hoped, a rich and happy man.

All this and much more he poured forth to his ghostly confessor, who, when all was said, glided slowly out, shut the door, and noiselessly locked it on the outside.

Four hours later the confessed criminal was in safe custody.

FIGHTING THE WALRUS.

It is doubtful whether there is a more exhilarating sport than fighting the walrus. In tiger hunting you kill your prey—if he does not kill you first—and that ends it. In walrus hunting, you kill your prey and then your trouble begins. It is easy enough to shoot your first walrus. He will lie on an ice cake, along with his companions, and allow you to come within a hundred feet if you approach gently in a small boat.

Then, raising his superb head until it offers the best possible target for your bullets, he will regard you in silence, and you can plant a shot in his vulnerable neck offhand. Then there will be flops on many neighboring ice floes, and splashes in the water, and loud, hoarse barkings will ring out, and in a moment you will see something that will make your heart jump, even though you be experienced in danger.

In all hunting, you will not see a more terrible nor a more magnificent bit of action than the charge of a herd of walrus.

When one of their friends is wounded, they collect in groups of twenty or thirty.

Their large circular eyes, bright red in the sunlight, glare with hatred; their long white tusks gleam fiercely, and, lifting their great heads high out of the water, dashing the foam away from their breasts with their motion, they rush upon you in a mass. If one gets his tusk over the gunwale of your boat, your life is worth exceedingly little. A walrus weighs nearly a ton, and he is strong in proportion. He may either tip your boat over or punch a hole through it with his tusks; in either case you would fall into water so cold that you would not be able to survive five minutes, even if the walrus did not attack you.

Flight from the charge is impossible; the walrus can rush through the water much faster than you can row. Your only safe course is to shoot the leaders of the herd. Then the rest are encumbered by the helpless bodies of their comrades lying upon the water; the charge is broken; the walrus becomes confused and frightened.

There is a mass of heads wildly bobbing up for a moment, and then they halt, turn with one accord and flee.

This is their method of fighting when they are assembled in numbers. When only two or three are gathered together they lack the confidence for a charge, but they pursue tactics that are just as exciting to those against whom their ire is kindled. They lift up their heads afar off, and gauge the distance between themselves and your boat. Then they dive, with much ungraceful exhibition of a black back and a flapping of broad hind flappers. The interval during which they are under water is not pleasant for you. Fortunately they do not often calculate their distance perfectly. Usually a great black head appears ten or fifteen feet away from you.

And you must be quite ready to shoot it with great promptness, or it will disappear again, and in a moment you will feel a scraping upon the bottom of your boat, and it will begin to rise bodily out of the water.

THE BICYCLE ERA.

Father (a few years hence)—"Why do you take your bicycle when you are going such a short distance? Why don't you walk?"

Daughter (modestly)—"Walk? Mercy, no! I don't want to be so conspicuous."

LETTING HER BABY DOWN EASY.

Pond Mother—"Do you think my daughter will become a fine pianist?"

Professor von Thump—"I am afrait not, madame. But after another year's practice, her fingers will be limbered up so dot she can make a prilliant success mit a typewriter."

RELIEF FOR MOTHERS.

Little Boy—"What's the use of so many queer letters in words? Look at that 'c' in 'indicted.'"

Little Girl—"I guess those is just put in so mothers can get an excuse to send their children to school and have a little peace."

THE NEWS OF ALL NATIONS.

Never Missed Fourth Wheel.

John Kaputa was driving his automobile through Tarrytown, N. Y., with two friends in the rear seat when a traffic policeman stopped him in Main Street.

"Hey, you only got three wheels on that car," said the policeman.

"By gollies, you're right," said Kaputa, looking down at the bare end of the front axle. "Now, I wonder what became of that other wheel."

Just then Ralph Todd, a son of Doctor Todd, ran up with the missing wheel. He said it had rolled off the automobile and onto his father's lawn in McKeet Avenue, half a mile away.

"That just shows how good the car is," said Kaputa, as he readjusted the wheel. "It can travel on three legs and still get there."

Eating Record by Rooster.

A Rhode Island Red rooster belonging to Miss Elizabeth Hodge, of Columbia, Mo., ate 1,115 grains of corn in thirty minutes at the Boone County poultry show here. The bird was fed for the first time in two days. So far as known this is the world's record.

Uhlmeyer Attempts Some Aerial Duties.

All the inhabitants and most of the rope in Lawrenceville, Ind., spent a busy afternoon when James M. Uhlmeyer, a farmer, weighing 400 pounds, climbed onto the roof of his two-story home to repair a shredded chimney. Just what put the idea that he was eligible for lofty repairing into Mr. Uhlmeyer's usually conservative mind will not be ascertained until he becomes fully conscious.

Mr. Uhlmeyer's home, which is insured against everything but landslide, started to creak about half-past two when he reached the garret and started up a four-step ladder which had up to that time borne an excellent reputation. Uhlmeyer had just succeeded in breaking the crystal of his watch, and was halfway out of the skylight when the ladder, with a faint groan, splintered and crumbled ignominiously away. Mr. Uhlmeyer was saved from a bad fall by his chin, which caught on the edge of the skylight.

No one will ever know, probably, the thoughts that raced through Uhlmeyer's mind at this time. He knew that if he dropped to the floor of the garret he probably would wind up in the subcellar of his home, and, to avoid this, all he had to do was to lift four hundred pounds out of an opening three feet square.

To make a long story readable, Mr. Uhlmeyer reached the roof. To make the same story remarkable, he fixed the wind-swept chimney, and to make the whole town excited, he was stricken with nervous prostration and started to scream.

Persons in all walks of life ran to the scene. The fire department clanged up; the town derrick was hauled forth; a steel crane was rigged out, and thousands of yards of rope were thrown up to where the noise was coming from.

Uhlmeyer finally tied himself into a great bundle, and bands of men on each side of the house manned the ropes and lowered him gently, using no hooks. The only accident was the knocking down of the chimney.

Although many persons in Lawrenceville appeared indifferent, the physicians announced that Mr. Uhlmeyer was in no danger.

Mistook Fine Cat for Coon.

Mistaking a black angora cat for a coon, the colored chauffeur of Carmen Runyon caused wild excitement in the aristocratic Altadena neighborhood, of Pasadena, Cal., when he and a bulldog gave chase, and, in true Kentucky style, the colored man shook the pet of Mrs. L. T. Chamberlain, a neighbor, from a tree to the greensward, where the dog, after a terrible battle, in which he was whooped on by the chauffeur, killed it and tore the beautiful fur to pieces.

"I wouldn't have taken the best automobile made for that cat, with the black chauffeur thrown in," declared Mr. Chamberlain, after the battle, and his wife was almost hysterical with weeping, for she had brought the pet from St. Paul two years ago, and it had been in the family and her constant companion for ten years.

The Runyons are as much cut up over it as the Chamberlains, and the chauffeur is in absolute disgrace.

Blackie had a particularly long and silky coat of black. A runway was built for her, and everything done for her comfort. She roamed about with never a fear until the coming of the Runyon chauffeur and a bulldog with cat-eating tendencies.

Oddly Mated Couple Marry.

First Selectman Henry A. Hurlbut, of Wilton, Conn., who, when he wants to get weighed, steps on the hay scales, for his poundage is 405, has taken unto himself a bride. Miss Roxanna Spooner, also of the village, was the young woman who walked up the aisle of the Congregational Church with him and faced the Reverend Robert F. Berry.

The only unusual feature of the wedding was that those who sat on the bridegroom's side of the aisle couldn't see the bride, for Miss Spooner weighs only ninety-five pounds.

Steals $1.60; Gets Life Term.

For the theft of 150 pennies and a plugged dime, Bernie Smith will spend the remainder of his life in the State penitentiary. Smith was sentenced by Judge Graham. It is alleged Smith broke into the offices of the Guyan Big Ugly & Coal River Railroad offices at Hamlin, W. Va., and stole $1.60 from the safe. A dollar and a half of the loot is said to have been in pennies.

Smith was arrested when he spent the plugged dime at the company store. It was the fourth time he had been convicted of larceny, and Judge Graham sentenced him under the habitual-criminal act.

Stray Cow "Chewing the Rag."

A cow caught by a farm hand, near Chariton, Ia., in the act of "chewing the rag" a few days ago was the means of about $800 worth of stolen property being un-

earthed. The man noticed the bovine chewing something black, and, upon investigation, discovered that it was a bolt of new cloth. A search of a near-by haystack revealed several sacks of merchandise.

Some freight cars in transit had been broken into recently, and a quantity of goods taken. The farm is in the edge of town and was convenient to the railroad track. The thieves had evidently dumped the goods from the train while it was in motion and concealed them in the haystack, expecting to remove them at a convenient time.

Harvard Spelling Bad.

Harvard students who show an inclination toward careless spelling and indifferent use of the English language in their examination papers are to have a course in the elementals, and a committee of the faculty has been chosen to see that they become more proficient before diplomas are awarded.

Some of the phonetic spelling that has appeared on examination papers at Cambridge would have made Andrew Carnegie's heart glad. It made the Harvard professors groan. In the matter of style the students were sometimes off color, too. And the punctuation marks were frequently found sprinkled here and there throughout a thesis without any special adherence to the commandments by which Harvard men are supposed to write.

Instructors in all Harvard departments are to confer early and often with the committee, telling in what respects they find the students err most frequently, and prompt steps will be taken to reform the wayward undergraduates.

200 Banquet in New Oil Tank.

In the depths of a 50,000-gallon steel oil tank, at Kennedale, a suburb of Fort Worth, Texas, 200 persons were entertained by the steel workers to celebrate the completion of the tank.

Tables, chairs, and the edibles were hoisted to the top of the tank and lowered on the inside. An organ was also lowered in the same way. Entrance for the guests was arranged through a four-foot manhole.

Telephone from Ocean to Ocean.

President Wilson recently participated in the longest telephone conversation ever held when he talked from the White House to San Francisco, a distance of 3,064 miles. President Moore, of the Panama-Pacific Exposition at San Francisco was at the other end of the wire.

"It appeals to the imagination to speak across the continent," said the president to Mr. Moore. "It is a fine omen for the exposition that the first thing it has done is to send its voice from sea to sea. I congratulate you on the prospects for a successful exposition."

At the San Francisco end of the wire was also Thomas A. Watson, who heard the first word ever spoken over a telephone wire, in Boston, in 1875. Alexander Graham Bell was then at the other end of the wire.

To Make Spelling Easy.

School children of Boston, Mass., will be taught the spelling of fewer words than their fathers and mothers were required to learn, according to the plan announced by Frank W. Ballou, director of the department of educational investigation and measurement.

Spelling books in common use contain from 10,000 to 15,000 words. Investigation, Mr. Ballou says, shows that the number of different words used by eighth-grade pupils in their written work is only about 2,100.

In view of the complaint of employers that many graduates stumble over common correspondence words like "accommodate," "miscellaneous," and "necessity," Mr. Ballou recommends that time be concentrated in learning how to spell correctly the words most likely to be needed for everyday use. In lists of words submitted by teachers as causing the pupils the most trouble, "which" appeared 115 times, "their" 98 times, "separate" 93 times, and "there" 74 times.

Caught Trout With His Nose.

Captain Harry Morse, of Hammondsport, N. Y., one of the well-known lake captains of central New York, is home again after having an operation performed in a Buffalo hospital. The captain can certainly claim all honors in being the only living man who has caught a fish with his nose.

While he was leaning over the stern of a rowboat on Lake Keuka, looking into the water, a four-pound trout jumped out of the water and sunk its teeth into Morse's nose. Morse jerked back his head while the trout hung on for a few seconds, and then dropped into the bottom of the boat. An eyewitness was present at the oars and came to his aid after the fish loosened his hold.

Buried Hand Cause of Pain.

Suffering intense pains in a hand which had been amputated and buried, Lewis Jefferson, living near Georgetown, Del., had no relief until the hand was uncovered and the fingers straightened out, since when he has felt no more pain.

The strange story is vouched for by Jefferson himself, who had his hand cut off by a circular saw several weeks ago. During the past week he has been suffering with severe pains and with an itching sensation in what would have been the palm of his hand.

Unrelieved by physicians, the young man acted on the advice of friends and dug up the amputated hand, which had been buried for nearly six weeks. The fingers of the hand were found in a cramped position. After straightening out the fingers and weighting them so that they could not again double up, the hand was reburied. All pain left Jefferson at once, and he claims that he has suffered no inconvenience since.

"Quads" are Born in Canada.

Mrs. Ernest A. Mathews, of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, gave birth to three girls and one boy. All are healthy and strong. Mrs. Mathews is thirty-five years of age, and these are her first children.

His Age Ninety-nine; His Wealth $99,000.

Robert Bates, of Letcher County, Ky., is ninety-nine years of age, according to the recent statement of his son. It is said that while the aged man's years have been accumulating, his financial standing has kept pace, so that his possessions are now estimated at $1,000 for each year of his life.

He is yet hale and hearty and is remarkably well preserved for his years. Quite recently he made a trip across the Cumberlands into Virginia alone on horseback, and drove thirty head of cattle home. His first wife

having died some years since, he has taken unto himself the second wife, who is much younger than himself. Six months since she gave birth to a son.

Robert Bates comes of a noted pioneer family of Kentucky. He is a brother to the late "Captain" Martin van Buren Bates, "The Kentucky Giant," who made a tour of England and Europe in the early seventies, and was known widely as the largest man of his time.

This Old Man Wears no Coat.

With the exception of the time he attended the funeral of his brother, five years ago, Joseph Wiscarson, a teamster, seventy-seven years old, residing in Atchison, Kan., never wore a coat in his life. When he took off his coat that time he caught a severe cold. Wiscarson never owned an overcoat. Despite his age, he works at coal hauling every day.

Calf is a Born Fly Swatter.

Ernest Admond, living near Glamorgan, Va., is the owner of a calf that was born with two tails and one ear. The calf is three weeks old and is a curiosity. Both tails are well developed and growing side by side. The one ear is normal, but the place where the other one should have been shows no sign of an ear. The calf is growing normally and seems to be in good health.

Gray Goose Defies Custom.

Mrs. John Cummings, who lives south of Albany, Mo., is the owner of a gray goose that defies the customs and traditions of its kind, and lays eggs in the winter. Goose eggs laid in the winter months are very rare, and this goose, that has laid a number of eggs, is considered an odd one of its kind.

State to Fight Bandits.

Mounted rangers, similar to the famous riders of Texas, are being asked of the Oklahoma legislature, now in session, to rid the State of its many organized bands of bank robbers. The rangers are asked by "Bill" Tilghman, Chris Madsen, and Frank Canton, long-time deputy United States marshals.

Three national and twelve State banks in Oklahoma have been robbed since May 21st last. Five of the robberies have occurred since January 4th, this year. The banks lost a total of $32,050 in cash, and suffered damage of more than $5,000 to safes and other property. Most of the robberies took place in daylight, and in a number of instances the robbers were not masked. Not since pioneer days in Oklahoma has there been such alarm among bankers. They have placed rifles in banks, and bank employees have been trained in the use of firearms.

The Oklahoma House has already passed a measure appropriating $15,000, from which to offer rewards for the capture of bank robbers.

Seven men have been arrested for the three most recent robberies, but none belonged to any of the old-time gangs.

Ninety-nine banks have been robbed in Oklahoma since Statehood, or since January 1, 1908. A total of $176,510 has been taken by the robbers, averaging $1,782 to the bank, and $24,753 per annum during the seven years. In addition, there have been forty-nine attempts to rob banks during that period; many of these attempts failed even after nitroglycerin or dynamite had been used, practically wrecking the bank buildings. The total damage is estimated close to $100,000.

There have been eight robbers killed by officers; ten have been convicted and sent to prison, an equal number of men charged with bank robbing have been acquitted, and, including five men arrested for the 1915 robberies, there are a number of cases pending in the courts at the present time. But the great majority of the robbers escaped.

The executive committee of the State Bankers' Association met in Oklahoma City recently and discussed plans to clear out the bands of robbers in the eastern portion of the State, where bank-insurance companies have threatened to cut off insurance in ten counties unless decisive action is taken.

In 1912 a law was enacted providing that the penalty for blowing a safe or door with explosives where money or accounts are confined should not be less than twenty years or more than fifty years. During the same year the Kansas legislature provided for life sentences for bank robbers, and, as a result, Kansas has had few robberies. As a rule, those few were along the Oklahoma border, the robbers thus having a good chance to hide in the Oklahoma hill country.

One Oklahoma State bank, that at Prue, near the corner of the Osage and Indian nation, has been robbed four times for a total of $6,100.

Present-day outlaw bands have found the Osage hills the same refuge as did the Daltons, Doolins, Cooks, Cravens, and other early-day border gangs.

Pet Terrier is Vegetarian.

Mrs. M. R. L. Freshel, president of the Millennium Guild, of Boston, Mass., an organization which opposes the slaughter of animals, has a Yorkshire terrier that is a vegetarian. Sister, as the terrier is known, according to Mrs. Freshel, has never eaten meat.

This is what Sister likes: Lentils, peas, beans, celery, carrots, radishes, lettuce, apples, nuts, eggs, oatmeal, and buttered toast.

German Walks 102,900 Miles.

Armed with signatures and seals of hundreds of officials in countless cities throughout the world which he has visited during his tramp of 102,900 miles within the last eleven years, Paul Preussler, of Dresden, Germany, who styles himself the world's champion walker, finally arrived at the Hoboken City Hall, and was received by city officials there.

Preussler is the sole survivor of a party of twelve young men who, on April 4, 1904, started from Dresden on a foot tour around the world. The other eleven foot tourists died on the way. Seven were stricken with jungle fever and died in Africa. One was fatally bitten by a cobra. Two were murdered by outlaws in Asia, and another was killed accidentally while traversing South America.

Many times Preussler has been on the verge of death, according to his statement, but he always managed to pull through safely, and expects to be back in Dresden on July 31, 1916. He will then have rounded out 125,000 miles, and will receive $16,000 from a combination of German newspapers, for whom he has been corresponding since he started on his world tour.

During his wanderings the globe-trotter has kept a

remarkable record. It shows that he has slept in the open air 2,710 nights and spent 940 nights in bed. He has walked an average of forty-five miles a day for 2,940 days. During 710 days he worked at odd jobs. He has worn out 103 pairs of shoes, and has had eighty-one soles and 134 heels placed on them. The expenditure for shoes was $644, and his total expenditures for the trip were $10,354.

"While on my journey I have not received a cent from home," he said. "It was stipulated in my contract with the newspapers that I was to earn my expenses. I have sold 57,658 postal cards and have earned about $2,200 at odd jobs. Another source of income has been derived from giving lectures about my experience. When I started from Dresden, nearly eleven years ago, I did not have a penny. To-day my capital consists of three dollars and sixty-eight cents and the best health any man could wish to have."

Preussler's baggage weighs forty-three pounds. His record and scrapbook alone weighs twelve pounds. He is bronzed by the weather, and speaks English, German, French, and Spanish fluently. Australia and Canada are the only countries in the world which he has not visited. He will start for Montreal, and go from there to Australia.

"No, I am not afraid that I will lose my wager by being made a prisoner of war," he said, with a smile. "The Allies are too good a sporting people to interfere with my sport."

From Washington, where he obtained the signatures of President Wilson and Secretary Bryan, the globe-trotter came to Hoboken. He is thirty-six years old and weighs 159 pounds.

Table Like Joseph's Coat.

A card table that contains 10,105 separate pieces of wood of nine different varieties has just been finished after more than a year's work by James Neill, of Orange, N. J. The table is two feet eight inches in height and has a diameter of three feet six inches. It has been pronounced by cabinet workers in this section one of the finest sample of "miscellaneous" work.

The woods used in making the table are all inlaid, and include mahogany, crotch mahogany, sycamore, rosewood, cherry, walnut, locust, white holly, and Irish-bog oak. The Irish-hog oak was collected by Mr. Neill in his native country in 1898. The wood is quite black, and Mr. Neill uses it to represent the ace of spades and the ace of clubs in inlaid cards on the table top. The ace of hearts and the ace of diamonds were similarly worked out with mahogany, the card surfaces in each case being of white holly.

Gets First Lesson in Natural History.

There are several things you cannot do to an ostrich. One of these is to say to him: "Here, chick—chick—chick!"

At least, you cannot say that to "General von Kluck," the large, clam-chowder-colored ostrich who is commander of the detachment of twelve California silly-loo birds en route from Glendale, in the tropic orange land, to Hamilton, Bermuda, aboard the steamship *Bermudian*.

Michael Tierney and three other longshoremen, of New York, on the *Bermudian's* deck learned this first lesson in natural history, and to their sorrow.

General von Kluck and his personally conducted party of large and limpid-eyed hens were being transferred on a Lackawanna tug from Hoboken to Pier 32, North River, where the *Bermudian* lay. As the tug snuggled alongside the wharf, General von Kluck saw a coil of fire hose there and remembered he had not dined. Escaping from his crate, he volplaned gracefully to the dock. Then it was Michael Tierney stopped his truck, took a long look at the long bird, and remarked he guessed maybe his liver complaint was worse than usual. So he called: "Here, chick, chick, chick!"

'Tis many a day since Michael Tierney has been put out with one punch, but on this occasion he was. Yea, verily. In the face it was—and straight from the knee. Same thing for two other longshoremen who tried to catch the bird. Finally they had to get a baggage hoist—one of those rope nets they bundle trunks in—to throw over the ostrich's head. And so they lowered him, squawking, into the hold.

"Give me an plain rhinoceros to handle next," feebly moaned Michael Tierney.

Strips Doll in Pulpit.

Had Billy Sunday visited Fuller Memorial Baptist Church, at Baltimore, Md., he would have learned a new "stunt" in illustrating sermons. The Reverend Doctor Weston Bruner, a revivalist in the Baptist campaign being conducted in Baltimore, after the manner of a magician, produced from some hidden recess a good-sized, rosy-cheeked blond baby doll. Thereupon he proceeded, in no mild terms, manipulating the toy as he did so, to illustrate and criticize modern feminine apparel.

The doll was dressed and undressed several times, decorated with jewelry, and clad in modest clothing, its primary covering being of the flashy type, with tight, slit skirt.

1812 Penny Found in Log.

While splitting wood on his farm near Newton, N. J., Amzi Cosner saw a piece of copper fall from one of the logs. He found that it was a penny, dated 1812. The coin was in a remarkable state of preservation, the figures on it being as easily distinguished as those on a newly minted coin.

It is likely that when the penny was new it was lost in a crack of the then young tree and became embedded in the bough.

178 Peers Serving in British Army.

There are 178 peers serving in the British army, including eight dukes, ten marquises, sixty-one earls, twenty-two viscounts, and seventy-seven barons. The Earl of Annesley, Viscount Hawarden, and Lord Congleton have been killed in battle, and the Duke of Roxburghe, the Marquises of Northampton and Tweeddale, the Earl of Leven, and Lords Gerard and Somers have been wounded, while the Earls of Erne and Stair have been taken prisoners by the Germans.

Jersey Town Boasts of Oldest "Fresh" Egg.

Newton, N. J., is a town where chickens flock in most of the back yards and where fresh eggs are a habit instead of a surprise. Small wonder, then, that traveling salesmen and casual tourists—not omitting the numerous Weary Willies—are wont to put in there when hankering for a double-egg omelet or a Sunday feast of chicken pot pie. Fried chicken has long been the standard password among the railroad boys who pass through the town by day or

by night. No restaurant could survive for a week without its huge stacks of fried and breaded young fowls to tempt the passer-by into parting with at least "two bits." And eggs! Well, walk right in—this is the number. Newton is not only Eggtown-on-the-Map, but it can now boast of having produced the oldest "fresh" egg ever sold or held in captivity.

Mrs. Wallace Douglas, wife of an instructor in Columbia University, who lives in Newton, bought a dozen eggs of her grocer yesterday. She opened one—then she opened the windows. She selected another, a real likely looking one, too, and examined it closely. Some one had admired the egg before, and probably had parted with it with great reluctance, and possibly with hope of some day reclaiming it, for upon it was written, with an indelible pencil: "May 6, 1892."

Horse's Leg Catches Fire.

Molly, the only horse in the world with a wooden leg, has been partially destroyed by fire.

Her owner is Jacob Abraham, of Hammond, Ind. Molly's hoof was trapped in a frog some time ago. A veterinary amputated it, and Jake framed up a wooden leg for her. She learned to handle it splendidly.

A day or two ago Molly was led to the hydrant to be watered. The hydrant was frozen and Jake built a bonfire around it with straw. Molly drew near to warm her feet and forgot which was the wooden one. It caught fire, but was extinguished before a passer-by could turn in a general fire alarm.

Inventors Still Chase This Myth.

Every now and then some one appears with a new perpetual-motion machine. Needless to say, no such machine has ever withstood the tests, but inventors persist in trying just the same. Accounts of several attempts to solve the "perpetual" problem have been printed from time to time, and there are many which never get before the public. The United States patent office comes into contact every year with thousands of these evidences of human ingenuity and hope.

Application for a patent costs a fee, which cannot be recovered if the patent is not granted. It is to save the expenditure of these fees, which amount to thousands of dollars annually, that the commissioner of patents has made a benevolent ruling.

Reputable patent attorneys usually tell the inventor that he is wasting his money in making application, but experience has shown that it is generally impossible to convince an inventor that his schemes are impracticable, so that many an attorney, sometimes against his will, is compelled to prepare specifications and claims which relate to an invention that is inoperative.

In the past it has been the practice of the patent office to demand a working model from the inventor of perpetual-motion machines. The man who cannot be convinced by an attorney that his machine is inoperative, is not likely to be discouraged by such requirements. The result is that many an inventor spends hundreds and perhaps thousands of hard-earned dollars in trying to build an operative perpetual-motion model.

Now, the commissioner, in order to spare the inventor the necessity of parting with at least the government fees for an application, has decided that hereafter no application for a patent on a perpetual-motion machine will be considered at all unless a working model is filed in the very first place.

The wording of the commissioner's ruling is as follows: "The views of the United States patent office are in accord with those of the scientists who have investigated this subject and are to the effect that such devices are physical impossibilities. The position of the office can be rebutted only by the exhibition of a working model. When an application is forwarded to the examiner for consideration, he will make no examination as to the merits, but his first action will be the requirement that a working model be filed."

Won His Own Funeral on Bet.

The body of Walter Campbell, a negro barber, was buried, in Little Rock, Ark., in the most elaborate casket that the largest local undertaking establishment could provide. The hearse was followed by a procession of carriages provided by the undertaker.

Just before the Jeffries-Johnson fight, Campbell made a bet with the white undertaker. If Jeffries won, Campbell was to shave the undertaker free as long as they both lived. If Johnson won, the undertaker was to provide a state funeral for Campbell. The barber having died last week, the undertaker conscientiously carried out the terms of the bet.

Animals Will Talk to Man Some Day, He Says.

"Some day a man will talk to his dog and his dog will talk to him. So will the man talk to birds of the air. It will be then that all animal and bird life becomes articulate and a widening of our horizon now undreamed of will result." This was the statement made in Los Angeles, Cal., recently by R. L. Garner, who has spent twenty-five years in the wilds of Africa studying the chimpanzee and the gorilla. He believes the first communication will be with these two animals.

"A dream, you say?" he continued. "Cannot the bee teach us the quick, effective elimination of the unfit and shirker? Cannot the birds tell us their secret of flying? Would we not like to know why the oriole, the ovenbird, or castle-building ant are so much better engineers than we are? I believe the day will come when they will be able to tell us. In many respects the gorilla or chimpanzee is far more civilized than man. You never did or never will hear of either abandoning their wives."

Makes a New Bowling Record.

A Detroit bowling team claims the world's record for a single game, having made a total of 1,240 pins in a five-man team match. The previous record is said to have been 1,213. Inasmuch as the score was made in competition, accompanied by official scorers, it is claimed the record should stand. The high individual score was 279, made by Captain John Higgins of the team.

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